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Miss L. F. Rostan.

From her loving friend

Mary F. Colby

Jan 5th 1869

DELAROCHE.

She took for him an ark of bulrushes, and laid it in the flags.

THE

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

MEDITATIONS

ON

SOME TRAITS OF FEMININE CHARACTER RECORDED IN SACRED HISTORY.

SELECTED FROM THE WORKS OF BISHOP HALL, BISHOP ANDREWES, CALVIN, LIGHTFOOT, AND OTHER WRITERS.

With Twelve Photographs

AFTER RAFFAELLE, GUIDO, GUERCINO, ARY SCHEFFER, DELAROCHE, AND OTHER MASTERS.

BOSTON:
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1869.

THE

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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THE

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

EVE.

ADAM'S story is all wonder: dust so raised to become so brave a creature: that bravery so soon lost; so soon repaired, and so hugely repaired to a better condition. That he is sensible of; therefore he calls his wife's name Eve, because mother to all living. He had named her as to her sex; now he gives her another name of distinction. Then she was called woman, because she was taken out of man; now Eve, because all living were to come out of her. Adam showed wisdom in naming the beasts; here he shows that and more, namely, faith and sense of his better estate. She was rather the mother of Death, having done that that brought death into the world; but he, sensible of a better life to come in by her, calls her Eve, Life, as the word signifies.

Lay this to that in St. John, i. 4, in Him was life, speaking of Christ, and the life was the light of men. Eve was the mother of all living, namely, of Christ, and all that live by Him.

So that hence I make this observation, that Adam and Eve believed and obtained life. For the proof of this, let us view their story.

God saith, I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Satan had accompanied with them till this promise came. He keeps to them, to cheer them; he persuaded them to hide

themselves from the presence of the Lord. But now she sets him at defiance. She sees her error; the serpent, saith she, deceived me: grows at enmity with him, having now a surer comfort promised, to rely upon.

God clothed them with skins; which is an evidence that they sacrificed. For they had no need of slaying beasts for any other purpose: flesh they might not eat. They were slain for sacrifice, and their skins served for clothing. Thus body and soul were provided for. And in these sacrifices they looked after Christ, and saw Him in figure. The first death in the world was Christ's dying in figure. Noah knew clean and unclean beasts, and sacrificed. This, undoubtedly, he had learned from the beginning.

As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began, says Zacharias; hinting, that from the very beginning of the world, there were prophets of the Messias. Thus Adam was a prophet of Christ: and prophesied of Him in the name of Eve, signifying Life.

The promise given in the curse of Satan, that God would put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head: this had that effect upon them, that they set themselves to defy Satan, and cleave to the seed promised. That mercy, that created them in an instant so perfect, recovered them in an instant.

They were now representative no more, as they were of mankind before the fall. They were stated in another representative, Christ. Now they acted for themselves, and He for them. Hence their faith was not imputed to posterity, though their sin was. They were built on another foundation than they were before. Then it was on nature, self-holiness, freedom of will; sandy foundations, because changeable. Now on a rock, grace, and the righteousness of Christ. Now they were under a promise, before not. That Christ should break the head of the serpent, contained the promise of all good things.

JOHN LIGHTFOOT.

SARAH.

AS Abraham is called the Father of the faithful, so it is also said to godly women concerning Sarah, Whose daughters ye are so long as ye do well. So that she is honoured with this title of being the mother of believers, as he was the father.

She is commended for her faith; for the author to the Hebrews telleth us, that by faith she received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a son when she was past age, because she was persuaded that He was faithful which had promised; where you see the nature of faith, it is an acknowledging of God's faithfulness, a giving Him the honour of his faith, and setting to one's seal that God is true. Faith causeth the mind of a man to submit itself to the word of God, and to be assured that He can and will keep promise; for to the promise of God it looketh principally; and this faith will cause a man to receive power from God to do those things which otherwise of himself he wanted all power to do. This faith will make a weak man strong, it will put fruitfulness into a barren womb, and life and strength into a dead body; it will make a barren soul fruitful in good works, and make the heart to conceive the word so as to bring forth the fruit of good living, whereto of itself it is as unable as a body past age is unapt to bring forth a child.

Then Sarah in respect of Abraham her husband had two worthy virtues. First she obeyed her husband. Her obedience shewed itself in a cheerful forwardness to prepare things necessary to entertain angels that came unto her in the likeness of men, for it is said, Abraham hasted into the tent to Sarah, and bade her quickly make

ready three measures of fine flour and make cakes upon the hearth, which she did accordingly without grumbling or deferring. She did not oppose her husband and demand, Husband, you know not what these men be, nor whence they come, why should you make such care to prepare for them? but without any more ado, at her husband's commandment, she got all things ready according to his desire. If any say that this was but a small matter, I answer, true, but it is reported as it were a taste of her good disposition in this matter, and a sign of her dutiful obedience, the glory whereof the Holy Ghost giveth her more generally, saying that she obeyed her husband, meaning constantly and generally she submitted herself and was obedient.

It is also noted of her that she reverenced her husband, which is also commanded to wives by St. Paul, saying, Let the wife see that she fear her husband. This is the fear of the wife, not to dare to displease her husband or anger him, not so much lest he should fly upon her with reproofs and blows, as lest she should be an instrument of grief to one whom she loveth and honoureth, by her undutifulness and rudeness. And it must be noted, that she did so reverence him as to call him lord. For that title she gave him even in her inward cogitations, when she said in herself at the hearing of the angel's promise, that she should have a son, Shall I have pleasure after I have waxed old, my lord being old also?

And now let us consider the weaknesses of Sarah. First, she was weak in faith; for this caused her to give Hagar to Abraham her husband, and so to bring the sin of polygamy into the church of God, wherewith it may seem it was not polluted before. She doubted lest herself should not be fruitful, and therefore brought Hagar to him, to try whether the promised seed might come of her. See how when God promised a thing in nature and reason utterly impossible, she so far forgot the omnipotent power of God as to think sure it could never come to pass.

Another fault of Sarah's was this, that once she forgat herself to

her husband, and was full of anger and discontent, wrongfully charging him to take her maid's part against her, saying, My wrong be on thee, for I have given my maid to thee, and now I am despised in her sight. It was true that Hagar did slight her too much, but that Abraham was guilty of this fault by bearing out Hagar in it, that was altogether false, as his answer proveth plainly; Thy maid is in thine hand, do with her what thou wilt. So Sarah's anger made her use false accusations against her husband.

But another weakness of Sarah is, that she was somewhat too rough with Hagar, insomuch that Hagar could not endure it; for if she was so violent in words with Abraham, what do you think her carriage was to the maid? Yea, she was something too earnest against Ishmael and her too, when nothing would serve her but that she must have them both together cast out of doors. For though God bade Abraham do according to her words, it followeth not thence that she was not over-passionate in it. God for a mystery would have it done, and yet Sarah might offend in doing it.

Sarah's last fault was, that she denied her laughter to the angel when she had sinned in laughing. To lie in a passion for fear of blame, denying that one hath done a thing which indeed one hath done, that so one may escape reprehension or correction, is a sin to which man's nature is very subject, springing from the want of the fear of God, and from an excessive carnal love to oneself and desire of his own temporal safety.

Yet God gave her faith and saving grace, pardoned and passed by her offences, and sanctified her and hath saved her soul notwithstanding her faults.

William Whately.

HAGAR.

ERS was a mother's heart,
That poor Egyptian's, when she drew apart,
Because she would not see
Her child beloved in his last agony:
When her sad load she laid
In her despair beneath the scanty shade
In the wild waste, and stept
Aside, and long and passionately wept.

Yet higher, more sublime,
How many a mother, since that ancient time,
Has shown the mighty power
Of love divine in such another hour!
Oh! higher love to wait
Fast by the sufferer in his worst estate,
Nor from the eyes to hide
One pang, but aye in courage to abide.

And though no angel bring
In that dark hour unto a living spring
Of gladness,—as was sent,
Stilling her voice of turbulent lament,—
Oh! higher faith to show,
Out of what depths of anguish and of woe,
The heart is strong to raise
To an all-loving Father hymns of praise.

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

THE DISMISSAL OF HAGAR.

HOW painful was the wound which the ejection of his first-born son inflicted upon the mind of Abraham, we may gather from the double consolation with which God mitigated his grief. He sends his son into banishment, just as if he were tearing out his own bowels. But being accustomed to obey God, he brings into subjection the paternal love which he is not able wholly to cast aside. There is no doubt that during the whole night he had been tossed with various cares; that he had a variety of internal conflicts, and endured severe torments; yet he arose early in the morning, to hasten his separation from his child, since he knew that it was the will of God.

Moses intimates, not only that Abraham committed his son to the care of his mother, but that he relinquished his own paternal right over him; for it was necessary for this son to be alienated, that he might not afterwards be accounted the seed of Abraham. But with what a slender provision does he endow his wife and her son! He places a flagon of water and bread upon her shoulder. Why does he not at least load an ass with a moderate supply of food? Why does he not add one of his servants, of which his house contained plenty, as a companion? Truly either God shut his eyes, that what he would gladly have done might not come into his mind; or Abraham limited her provision in order that she might not go far from his house. For doubtless he would prefer to have them near himself, for the purpose of rendering them such assistance as they would need.

Meanwhile, God designed that the banishment of Ishmael should be thus severe and sorrowful; in order that, by his example, He might

strike terror into the proud, who, being intoxicated with present gifts, trample under foot in their haughtiness the very grace to which they are indebted for all things. Therefore He brought the mother and child to a distressing issue. For after they had wandered into the desert, the water fails; and the mother departs from her son, which was a token of despair. Such was the reward of the pride by which they had been vainly inflated. It had been their duty humbly to embrace the grace of God offered to all people in the person of Isaac: but they impiously spurned him whom God had exalted to the highest honour. And because nothing was more desirable for them than to retain some corner in Abraham's house, they ought not to have shrunk from any kind of subjection for the sake of so great a benefit. God now exacts from them the punishment which they had deserved by their ingratitude.

God heard the voice of the lad. Moses had said before, that Hagar wept: how is it then that disregarding her tears, God only hears the voice of the lad? It is not said that their vows and sighs were directed towards heaven; it is rather to be believed, that in bewailing their miseries, they did not resort to divine help. But God, in assisting them, had respect, not to what they desired of Him, but to what He had promised to Abraham, concerning Ishmael. In this sense, Moses seems to say that the voice of the boy was heard, namely, because he was the son of Abraham.

The angel reproves the ingratitude of Hagar; because, when reduced to the greatest straits, she does not reflect on God's former kindness to her in similar danger: so that, as one who had found Him to be a deliverer, she might again cast herself upon His faithfulness. Nevertheless the angel assures her that a remedy is prepared for her sorrows, if only she will seek it. In the clause,—What aileth thee? is a reproof for having tormented herself in vain by confused lamentation. When he afterwards says, Fear not, he invites and exhorts her to hope for mercy.

To relieve the despair of the anxious mother, the angel commands

her to return to the place where she had laid down her son. For, as is usual in desperate circumstances, she had become stupefied through grief; and would have lain as one lifeless, unless she had been roused by the voice of the angel. We perceive, moreover, in this example, how truly it is said that when father and mother forsake us, the Lord will take us up.

In order that she might have more courage to bring up her son, God confirms to her what He had before often promised to Abraham. Indeed, nature itself prescribes to mothers what they owe to their children; but as I have lately hinted, all the natural feelings of Hagar would have been destroyed unless God had revived her, by inspiring new confidence, to address herself with fresh vigour to the fulfilment of her maternal office. With respect to the fountain, or well, some think it suddenly sprung up. But since Moses says that the eyes of Hagar were opened, and not that the earth was opened or dug up, I rather incline to the opinion that, having been previously astonished with grief, she did not discern what was plainly before her eyes; but now, at length, after God has restored her vision, she begins to see it. And it is worthy of especial notice, that when God leaves us destitute of His superintendence, and takes away His grace from us, we are as much deprived of all the aids which are close at hand, as if they were removed to the greatest distance. Therefore, we must ask, not only that He would bestow upon us such things as will be useful to us, but that He will also impart prudence to enable us to use them; otherwise, it will be our lot to faint, with closed eyes, in the midst of fountains.

JOHN CALVIN.

THE CITY OF REFUGE.

ANGEL of wrath! why linger in mid air,
While the devoted city's cry
Louder and louder swells? and canst thou spare,
Thy full-charged vial standing by?'
Thus, with stern voice, unsparing Justice pleads:
He hears her not—with softened gaze
His eye is following where sweet Mercy leads,
And till she give the sign, his fury stays.

Guided by her, along the mountain road,
Far through the twilight of the morn,
With hurrying footsteps from the accursed abode,
He sees the holy household borne:
Angels, or more, on either hand are nigh,
To speed them o'er the tempting plain,
Lingering in heart, and with frail sidelong eye
Seeking how near they may unharmed remain.

'Ah! wherefore gleam those upland slopes so fair?
And why, through every woodland arch,
Swells yon bright vale, as Eden rich and rare,
Where Jordan winds his stately march;
If all must be forsaken, ruined all,
If God have planted but to burn?
Surely not yet the avenging shower will fall,
Though to my home for one last look I turn.'

Thus while they waver, surely long ago
They had provoked the withering blast,
But that the merciful avengers know
Their frailty well, and hold them fast.

'Haste, for thy life escape, nor look behind—'
Ever in thrilling sounds like these
They check the wandering eye, severely kind,
Nor let the sinner lose his soul at ease.

And when, o'erwearied with the steep ascent,
We for a nearer refuge crave,
One little spot of ground in mercy lent,
One hour of home before the grave,
Oft in his pity o'er his children weak,
His hand withdraws the penal fire,
And where we fondly cling, forbears to wreak
Full vengeance, till our hearts are weaned entire.

Thus, by the merits of one righteous man,
The Church, our Zoar, shall abide,
Till she abuse, so sore, her lengthened span,
E'en Mercy's self her face must hide.
Then, onward yet a step, thou hard-won soul;
Though in the Church thou know thy place,
The mountain farther lies—there seek thy goal,
There breathe at large, o'erpast thy dangerous race.

Sweet is the smile of home; the mutual look
When hearts are of each other sure;
Sweet all the joys that crowd the household nook,
The haunt of all affections pure;
Yet in the world e'en these abide, and we
Above the world our calling boast:
Once gain the mountain-top, and thou art free:
Till then, who rest, presume; who turn to look, are lost.

JOHN KEBLE.

LOT'S WIFE.

OUR Saviour Christ, after a special manner, commendeth unto us this story of Lot's wife. Of which thus much we may say, that it is the only one story which, of all the stories of the Old Testament, He maketh His choice of to put in His memento; which He would have them which have forgotten to remember, and those that remember never to forget. Oft to repair to this story, and to fetch salt from this pillar: that they lose not that they have done, and so perish in the recidivation of Lot's wife.

The angel had given charge to Lot and his company, Scape for thy life; stay not in the plain; look not once behind thee, lest thou perish. Scape for thy life—she trifled for all that, as if no peril were. Stay not in the plain—yet stayed she behind. Look not back lest thou die—she would and did look back, to die for it. So that she did all that she was forbid, and regarded none of the angel's words, but despised the counsel of God against her own soul. This was her sin, the sin of disobedience, but consisteth of sundry degrees by which she fell, needful all to be remembered.

The first was, that she did not strictly keep her to the angel's charge, but dallied with it, and regarded it by halves; that is, say what he would, she might use the matter as she would; go, or stay and look about as she list. Such light regard is like enough to have grown of a wandering distrust; lest haply she had left Sodom in vain, and the angel feared them with that which never should be. The sun rose so clear, and it was so goodly a morning, she repented she came away. Reckoning her sons-in-law more wise in staying still, than Lot and

herself in so unwisely departing. Which is the sin of unbelief, the bane both of constancy and perseverance. Constancy in the purpose of our mind, and perseverance in the tenor of our life.

From this grew the second, that she began to tire and draw behind, and kept not pace with Lot and the angels. An evil sign. For ever fainting is next step to forsaking; and a preparative to a giving clean over. He that hath not list to follow, saith Solomon, will pick some quarrel or other to be cast behind.

This tiring, had it grown of weakness, or weariness, or want of breath, might have been borne with; but it came of another cause, which is the third degree. It was, saith the Scripture, at least to look back, and to cast her eye to the place her soul longed after. Which sheweth that the love of Sodom sticked in her still; that though her feet were come from thence, her heart stayed there behind; and that in look and thought she returned thither, whither in body she might not, but possibly would in body too, if as Nineveh did, so Sodom had still remained.

Looking back might proceed of divers causes; so might this of hers, but that Christ's application directs us. The verse before saith, Somewhat in the house: something left behind affected her, of which He giveth us warning. She grew weary of trouble, and of shifting so oft. From Ur to Haran; thence to Canaan; thence to Egypt; thence to Canaan again; then to Sodom, and now to Zoar; and that in her old days, when she would fainest have been at rest. Therefore in this wearisome conceit of new trouble now to begin, and withal remembering the convenient seat she had in Sodom, she even desired to die by her flesh-pots, and to be buried in the graves of lust; wished them at Zoar that would, and herself at Sodom again, desiring rather to end her life with ease in that stately city than to remove, and be safe perhaps, and perhaps not, in the desolate mountains. And this was the sin of restiness of soul, which affected her eyes and knees, and was the cause of all the former. When men weary of a good course which long they have holden, for a little ease or wealth, or I wot not what other secular

respect, they fall away in the end, so losing the praise and fruit of their former perseverance, and relapsing into the danger and destruction, from which they had so near escaped.

Behold, these were the sins of Lot's wife: a wavering of mind, slow steps, the convulsion of her neck—all these caused her weariness and fear of new trouble—she preferred Sodom's ease before Zoar's safety. Remember Lot's wife.

At that instant she woefully perished, when God's special favour was proffered to preserve her, and when, of all other times, she had means and cause to stand, then, of all other times, she fell away. Many were the mercies she found and felt at God's hands by this very title, that she was Lot's wife. For by it she was incorporated into the house and family, and made partaker of the blessings of the faithful Abraham. It was a mercy to be delivered from the errors of Ur; a mercy to be kept safe in Egypt; a mercy to be preserved from the sin of Sodom; a mercy to be delivered from the captivity of the five kings; and this, the last and greatest mercy, that she was sought to be delivered from the perishing of the five cities. This, no doubt, doth mightily aggravate the offence, that, so many ways before remembered by God in trouble, she so coldly remembered Him, and that now presently, being offered grace, she knoweth not the day of her visitation; but being brought out of Sodom, and warned of the danger that might ensue, having the angels to go before her, Lot to bear her company, her daughters to attend her, and being now at the entrance of Zoar, the haven of her rest; this very time, place, and presence she maketh choice of to perish in, and to cast away that which God would have saved; in respect of herself, desperately; of the angels, contemptuously; of her husband and daughters, scandalously; of God and His favours, unthankfully; forsaking her own mercy, and perishing in the sin of wilful defection.

The sound of death is fearful, what death soever; yet it is made more fearful four ways, which all be in this of hers.

We desire to die with respite, and sudden death we fear and pray

against. Her death was sudden: back she looked, and never looked forward more. It was her last look.

We desire to have remorse of sin ere we be taken away, and death in the very act of sin is most dangerous. Her death was so. She died in the very convulsion—she died with her face to Sodom.

We would die the common death of mankind, and be visited after the visitation of other men, and an unusual strange death is full of terror. Hers was so. God's own hand from heaven, by a strange and fearful visitation.

Our wish is to die, and to be buried, and not to remain a spectacle above ground, which nature abhorreth. She so died, as she remained a spectacle of God's wrath, and a by-word to posterity, and as many as passed by. For until Christ's time, and after, this monument was still extant, and remained undefaced so many hundred years. Josephus, a writer of good account, which lived after this, saith, I myself have seen and beholden it, for it stands to be seen to this day.

A reed she was; a pillar she is, which she seemed to be, but was not. She was melting water; she is congealed salt. Thus have we both her fault and punishment. Let us remember both; to shun the fault, that the penalty light not on us.

BISHOP ANDREWES.

ISAAC'S BRIDE.

I READ in God's great holy book
The tale of Isaac's bridal tent;
And like the murmur of a brook,
(That brings to 'one in city pent'
Gleams of the country far away,
Of blossomed orchards in their glory,
And clover-fields, and scented hay)
Were thoughts that came with that sweet story;

Till I was rapt into a dream
Of olden days, and eastern clime,
Wherein I saw (or so did seem),
The men of patriarchal time,
The pastoral chiefs who spake with God,
The veilèd maid, the comely wife,
The rich flocks scattered o'er the sod,
And all the charms of tented life.

The desert's burning breath I felt,
I heard the camels' tinkling bell;
And when the faithful servant knelt
At even by the city well,

I saw his young lord's destined bride—
A damsel very fair, and young—
Come tripping to the water-side,
Her pitcher on her shoulder slung.

I marked his wonder, as the dew
She scattered round the fountain's brink,
While in her courteous haste she drew
And gave the weary camels drink.
I watched what blushes bright and warm
To cheek and brow did instant spring,
When on the maiden's delicate arm
He hung the heavy golden ring.

I saw the feast of welcome spread,
While loud he praised his master's lord;
I heard how well the wooing sped,
How gentle was the kinsman's word,
Content—since God had willed it so,
That hand and heart the maid hath given,
And when she whispered, 'I will go,'
They blessed her with the wealth of heaven.

Another eve—and Hebron lay
All flooded with a tender light—
The last tints of a rosy ray
That lingers somewhere out of sight,—
What time, the long day's labour done,
Came Isaac from the green well-side,
Out in the quiet fields alone
To meditate at eventide.

He saw afar the dust uprise,
  The camel-driver's song he heard;
But who is she that lifts her eyes,
  Then hides them, like a frightened bird?
A trembling thing with covered face
  Into his mother's tent he led,
And set her there, in Sarah's place,
  And loved her, and was comforted.

Sure such a tale, so sweet, so fair,
  Around our hearts should linger long,
Familiar as a household air,
  And soothing as a cradle song.
And we may learn of their meek ways,
  Their trustful faith in heaven above,
Their calm of unambitious days,
  Their simple truth, and modest love.

C. F. Alexander.

REBEKAH.

THE Lord replied to the enquiries of Rebekah concerning her children, by saying, that they should be the heads of two nations, and that the elder should serve the younger. Thus was a prophecy delivered that Esau should serve Jacob; or, at least, that the posterity of Esau should serve that of Jacob. It may please God to foretel future events, but it is not therefore our duty to endeavour, by crooked means, to bring them to pass. God does not give us prophecy for our rule of conduct. He will accomplish His purposes in His own manner. It may be happy for us that we understand so little of His secret purposes. In this very instance, some knowledge of His intention may possibly have laid the foundation of the fraud of Jacob, and the unhappiness of Rebekah.

Parents are frequently disappointed in their offspring, and troubled during their lives, through a cause which they little suspect. They complain of their children, when perhaps the fault may be in themselves. They have indulged an early partiality, founded upon no just reasons, which has been productive on each side of the worst effects. There is but one true ground of preference with respect to children, to friends, to neighbours, to acquaintance, namely, that of real excellence. But how many false, and frivolous, and artificial distinctions, have been introduced by the caprice, the pride, the false taste of the world. The case of Isaac and Rebekah illustrates this remark. Their own unhappiness, and the discord of their children, were chiefly referable to a foolish and unfounded partiality in themselves. Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebekah loved Jacob, because

his temper and habits led him to be much with her in the tent. When will men learn to watch their partialities, their prejudices, and their passions?

Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, being perhaps considerably more than a hundred years old. Uncertain how soon his death might take place, he determines to give his solemn and prophetic blessing to his eldest son. Rebekah hears him express his intention; and now all her feelings for her favourite Jacob are called forth. Hitherto, perhaps, her partiality had displayed itself in trifles, though it had produced the most mischievous consequences. Now, however, where a peculiar temptation occurred, she proceeds to sacrifice to it truth, honour, justice, and common honesty. We ought to judge of the evil of our passions, not by the effects which they have produced, but rather by those which they may produce under circumstances of temptation. The criminality of Rebekah's partiality, which perhaps she had not suspected, now discovered itself. It led her to deceive, to lie, and to defraud. It was obviously her duty to leave to God the performance of His promise. But she considered the hour as come. Isaac would in a few hours give the blessing to Esau, and Jacob would be deprived of it. What must she do? Not a moment was to be lost. The design of God to give the superiority to Jacob would, she thought, excuse some degree of fraud. She meant to further the divine intentions. But we ought to know that the secret, and even the revealed decrees of the Almighty, make no change in the moral evil of an action. God may as sincerely punish the man who executes, as the man who opposes His will, if each is alike acting in his own spirit, and pursuing his own ends.

Rebekah having formed her plan, communicates it to Jacob. Two reasons might concur in leading him to fall in with it; regard for his mother, and jealousy of Esau, arising out of his father's partiality. Scruples would indeed obtrude; but interest would plead irresistibly against them. Probably, also, he might infer from the prophecy, that God intended for him the blessing; or assume that he was entitled

to it by right of purchase. How awfully does interest pervert the judgment, and palliate the worst actions.

While Jacob hesitates, Rebekah is not afraid to urge him to the imposture: Upon me be the curse, my son; only obey my voice. Oh, what a situation for a mother—for a mother who, it might be hoped, had been a suitable companion for the patriarch Isaac—urging her son to an act of fraud upon his father, and perfidy towards his brother, and using her maternal authority to ensure compliance! Upon me be the curse! But this would not acquit Jacob: the punishment fell with a heavy weight upon both.

Their imposture had succeeded; but it was a success which embittered the whole life both of Jacob and of his parent. Rebekah, the contriver of the fraud, was deprived of her favourite child, probably for the remainder of her days. He who should have been the stay and the consolation of her declining years, was a stranger in a distant land, banished from his home by means of an act of sin. How bitter would be the blessing which it cost so much to obtain! How, as he wandered a fugitive from his father's house, would the very object of the fraud seem to be defeated! Instead of the elder serving the younger, Jacob was a poor and banished stranger in continual terror of his brother.

John Venn.

THE ANGEL OF MARRIAGE.

WAS God Himself to Adam brought
His one appointed bride;
And by Himself the gift that wrought,
The gift was sanctified.

And for his son when Abraham sent
To seek the destined maid,
God's angel-watch before him went,
And all their path arrayed.

I deem that these—and such as these,
Unknown to sight or sense,
Do speak in marriage destinies
Unwonted providence.

A special guiding beyond all
Mysteriously attends,
By Him who makes the secret call,
And hallows all the ends.

And therefore those I deem unwise,
Fond tales of earthly love,
Which seem to trifle with the ties
Hid in God's hand above.

Of patient fear we need far more,
And more of faith's repose,
Of looking more to God before,
Till He His will disclose.

For better far than passion's glow,
Or aught of worldly choice,
To listen His own will to know,
And listening hear His voice.

To fear lest led by Heaven's own guide,
We have a human will,
Which clings for evil to our side,
Its judgments to fulfil.

And in these thoughts to read the sign
Of nobler things allied,
To know a leading more divine,
A more enduring Bride.

If thus a watch peculiar waits
On marriages below,
So intertwined with human fates,
For this world's weal or woe;

How beautiful, how sweet the Guide,
When God shall send His Dove,
And lead us onward by our side,
To everlasting Love!

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

JACOB'S WIVES.

NOW Jacob rests where all his kindred are,—
The exile from the land in which of old
His fathers lived and died, he comes from far
To mix his ashes with their sacred mould.
There where he stood with Esau, in the cold
Dim passage of the vault, with holy trust
His sons lay down the venerable dust.

They laid him close by Leah, where she sleeps
Far from her Syrian home, and never knows
That Reuben kneels beside her feet and weeps,
Nor glance of kindly recognition throws
Upon her stately sons from that repose;
His Rachel rests far-sundered from his side,
Upon the way to Bethlehem, where she died.

Sleep on, O weary saint! thy bed is blest,
Thou, with the pilgrim-staff of faith, hast passed
Another Jordan into endless rest:
Well may they sleep who can serenely cast
A look behind, while darkness closes fast
Upon their path, and breathe thy parting word,
'For Thy salvation I have waited, Lord!'

J. D. Burns.

LEAH AND RACHEL.

THE holy writers of old speak in a peculiar manner of Jacob and all that appertains to him; they do not dwell so much on the incidents of history as such, but speak of them as full of the Gospel in type and figure. But more especially I would notice what is said respecting his two wives, Leah and Rachel. It may be also partly owing to the evil and sorrow which is bound up with the history of them and their children, that good men have delighted to let their minds rest on the goodness of God and the things prepared for them that love Him, which He foreshadowed and brought about through their instrumentality, and to meditate therein on the mysteries of faith, rather than on the earthly side of that picture. So it has been that Leah and Rachel have been considered in the Church as representing the two states of those who by faith are made partakers with the Israel of God. Leah speaks of action; Rachel of contemplation; both must be combined in the true Israelite of God; they cannot be separated; labour and love; toil and rest; nor can we have one without the other.

The history of itself is in many respects a painful one—the deceivings of Laban; the double marriage; the envyings of Rachel; her complainings to her husband, rather than, as Hannah, in like case, to God; her retaining and hiding secretly the images of idolatry, the undeserved humiliation and sorrows of Leah that move the compassions of God to espouse her cause; the sinful children of Leah; these are sad and evil. Yet, notwithstanding these, there is a thread of deepest interest running through the whole history, in the religious thankfulness and patience of Leah; and in all memorials of her who was the mother of the holy

Joseph, beloved of God and man, and of the blameless Benjamin. And who is there that can forget the well of Rachel, where Jacob, when he first beheld her, lifted up his voice and wept? And the tomb of Rachel, where, it is said, Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. To all ages were the remembrances of that tomb, on the way to Bethlehem-Ephrata, as the fragrance that remained of a fair and sweet flower. For it was of that grave that the Gospel speaks in the mourning for the little children at Christ's birth, as Rachel weeping for her children. Thus, I say, while the literal and plain history is full of sacred associations, we are glad to find in the history lessons of further good, and to dwell on those beautiful treasures of Christian wisdom which it has been supposed to contain. The goodly and fair flower fadeth, but the healthful medicine extracted from it remains.

Further, in excuse for thus considering it, we may observe how often Holy Scripture dwells on the images of human love, in speaking of that which is divine. And to those who have had, it may be, feeling tokens of the love of Christ in the conversion of the soul, in drawing it off from earthly things to Himself, there cannot but be always something very moving in the recollections of it ever afterwards, when looked back upon in hours of affliction after many years. It is this which God appeals to in Scripture, of the sweetness and strength of first love: I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.

As the dews and fragrance of morning; as the sunshine and showers of spring; as the smiles and tears of an infant; as the sad or sweet dreams of childhood, so the sorrows and consolations of that first awakening to God's truth may ever be in remembrance upon the soul, when, it may be, amongst bitter sorrows and despondency we beheld the gracious look of Christ's countenance upon ourselves, pleading with us and calling us back unto Himself, when we were entangled as the lost sheep among thorns, when He extricated us from them, from the effects of which He Himself and we also with Him are bleeding.

Such is the first love of Rachel, through the heat of the day to the end. 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside?' In the approaches of death it is as the evening sun coming forth on the eastern hills from whence first it arose.

Such, then, is that lesson which, as a type, this history contains; both may be found in the kingdom of God, as serving one Lord, and united to one Lord; Leah is of Christian righteousness; Rachel, of Christian wisdom; Leah sets forth the practical life; Rachel, that of devotion; Leah, whose very name signifies labour, is expressive of this temporal life in which we toil; Rachel, of that eternal life to which, through these toils, we aspire. This life of labour we choose not for its own sake, but for that which comes after.

Leah is of the law wherein there are many commandments, but one with promise; Rachel, of the Gospel where every commandment is with a blessing; Leah is of godly fear, which comes first; Rachel, of godly love, which comes afterwards; in Leah is felt the spirit of bondage; in Rachel, that of adoption; when Israel served for Rachel his bondage became glad filial service.

Leah hath tender eyes, she sees not afar off, her eyes are dimmed with present sorrow. For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices uncertain. But Rachel is fair and bright with that illumination which is from God. Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off. Wisdom is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with light she is found before it. Yet the former is more fruitful, for the works of patient endurance bring many souls unto Christ, while contemplation alone is comparatively barren, till by prayers to God she at length obtaineth increase, and in death is fruitful, and after death remembered.

Isaac Williams.

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER.

AS it no more than an admiration of the child's beauty, which pleaded with Moses' parents for his life? It is certain that natural affection might have carried them much farther than this. But we are acquainted with their real motive by an infallible interpreter. They acted by faith. Committing it to the care of God, and in a cheerful expectation of His gracious interposition, they resolved to hide it, whatever risk they might run; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

After three months, however, the concealment of their son was discovered; and probably apprehending that he might be forcibly dragged from them by the murderous hands of an executioner, they were driven to the very painful necessity of exposing him on the waters.

On what a precarious issue did the hope of Israel then appear to rest! But the matter was in God's hands; and with Him there can be no such thing as chance or uncertainty. He who is the protector of His people had contrived the way of safety; a way which no human sagacity could have planned, or brought into effect. Just at the proper moment He directed the steps of Pharaoh's daughter to the place where the infant was exposed. The little basket was discovered and taken out of the water; the babe wept; at the sight of which the princess, touched with compassion, instantly formed the determination to preserve and educate the child as her own. By the interposition of the sister who stood by to tend the important charge, it was again committed to the care of its mother, who was then appointed to nurse

it, not as a poor Hebrew doomed to slavery, but as an Egyptian prince. In process of time, he appeared at court as the adopted son of the king's daughter, and received an education suitable to this elevated rank.

Here is a wonderful chain of events, all leading to one grand object, and all of them such as seemed most unlikely to happen; and yet they were brought about by means which would commonly be called accidental. It was the Divine purpose to exalt Moses, in order to qualify him for the high office of the leader and commander of Israel. But the situation of that oppressed people, and the cruel edict of Pharaoh, were great obstacles to this intended promotion: humanly speaking, the thing was impossible. Who could have supposed that the princess of the land would be the instrument of preserving and advancing Moses, of defeating her father's design, and finally of rescuing the Israelites from their bondage? And yet no other person, probably, would have dared to save a life condemned by the sovereign, or could have effected the plan. Do we not see the hand of God, then, conducting her to the river's side, to the very spot, at the proper, the necessary moment? Shall we not allow, that the thought of adopting the child was by Him impressed upon her mind, and therefore that she persisted in it against many difficulties, which could not but occur to her? For though she felt compassion for the perishing infant, yet when its mean original was considered, it must appear an unsuitable object for her notice; it was the offspring of strangers who had no claim to her protection, who were become offensive to the whole nation, and were suspected to be dangerous to the government; and as it was already sentenced to die by the express injunction of her father, she might seem to be acting a traitorous part in attempting its preservation. But under the Divine influence all objections vanished, and the way was easy.

THOMAS ROBINSON.

MIRIAM.

THE Israelites are stayed seven days in the station of Hazeroth for the punishment of Miriam. The sins of the governors are a just stop to the people; all of them smart in one; all must stay the leisure of Miriam's recovery. Whosoever seeks the Land of Promise shall find many lets: Amalek, Og, Sihon, and the kings of Canaan meet with Israel: these resisted, but hindered not their passage; their sins only stay them from removing. Afflictions are not crosses to us in the way to heaven, in comparison to our sins.

What is this I see? Is not this Aaron, that was brother in nature, and by office joint commissioner with Moses? Is not this Aaron, that made his brother an intercessor for him to God, in the case of his idolatry? Is not this Aaron, that climbed up the hill of Sinai with Moses? Is not this Aaron, whom the mouth and hand of Moses consecrated a high-priest unto God? Is not this Miriam, the elder sister of Moses? Is not this Miriam, that led the triumph of the women, and sung gloriously to the Lord? Is not this Miriam, which laid her brother Moses in the reeds, and fetched her mother to be his nurse? Both prophets of God; both the flesh and blood of Moses: and doth this Aaron repine at the honour of him which gave himself that honour and saved his life? Doth this Miriam repine at the prosperity of him whose life she saved? Who would not have thought this should have been their glory, to have seen the glory of their own brother? What could have been a greater comfort to Miriam than to think, How happily doth he now sit at the stern of Israel, whom I saved from perishing in a boat of bulrushes! It is to me that Israel owes this commander. But now envy hath so blinded their eyes, that they can neither see this privilege of nature, nor the honour of God's choice. Miriam and Aaron are

in mutiny against Moses. Who is so holy that sins not? What sin is so unnatural, that the best can avoid, without God?

The Midianitish wife of Moses cost him dear. Before, she hazarded his life; now, the favour of his people: unequal matches are seldom prosperous. Although now this scandal was only taken, envy was not wise enough to choose a ground of the quarrel. Whether some secret and emulatory brawls passed between Zipporah and Miriam (as many times these sparks of private brawls grow into a perilous and common flame), or whether, now that Jethro and his family were joined with Israel, there were surmises of transporting the government to strangers; or whether this unfit choice of Moses is now raised up to disparage God's gifts in him; even in sight the exceptions were frivolous. Emulation is curious, and out of the best person or act, will raise something to cavil at.

Seditions do not ever look the same way they move. Wise men can easily distinguish betwixt the vizor of actions and the face. The wife of Moses is mentioned, his superiority is shot at. Pride is lightly the ground of all sedition. Which of their faces shined like Moses? Yea, let him but have drawn his vail, which of them durst look on his face? Which of them had fasted twice forty days? Which of them had ascended up to the top of Sinai, and was hid with smoke and fire? Which of them received the law twice in two several tables, from God's own hand? and yet they dare say, Hath God spoken only by Moses? They do not deny Moses's honour, but they challenge a part with him; and as they were the elder in nature, so they would be equal in dignity, equal in administration. According to her name Miriam would be exalted. And yet how unfit were they! one a woman, whom her sex debarred from rule; the other a priest, whom his office sequestered from earthly government. Self-love makes men unreasonable, and teaches them to turn the glass, to see themselves bigger, others less than they are. It is a hard thing for a man willingly and gladly to see his equals lifted over his head in worth and opinion.

Without any delation of Moses, God hears and challenges them. Because he was meek, therefore he complained not, therefore the Lord struck in for him the more. The less a man strives for himself, the more is God his champion. It is the honour of great persons to undertake the patronage of their clients: how much more will God revenge His elect, which cry to Him day and night! He that said, I seek not mine own glory, adds, But there is one that seeks it, and judges. God takes his part ever, that fights not for himself.

God might have spoken so loud, that heaven and earth should have heard it, so as they should not have needed to come forth for audience; but now He calls them out to the bar, that they may be seen to hear. It did not content Him to chide them within doors: the shame of their fault had been less in a private rebuke; but the scandal of their repining was public. Where the sin is not afraid of the light, God loves not the reproof should be smothered.

They had depressed Moses, God advances him: they had equalled themselves to Moses, God prefers him to them. Their plea was, that God had spoken by them, as well as by Moses; God's reply is, that He hath in a more entire fashion spoken to Moses than to them. God spake to the best of them, but either in their dream, sleeping, or in vision, waking; but to Moses He spake with more inward illumination, with more lively representation: to others, as a stranger; to Moses, as a friend. God had never so much magnified Moses to them, but for their envy. We cannot devise to pleasure God's servants so much as by despiting them.

God was angry when He chid them, but more angry when He departed. The withdrawing of His presence is the presence of His wrath. Whilst He stays to reprove, there is favour in His displeasure; but when He leaves either man or church, there is no hope but of vengeance. The final absence of God is hell itself. When He forsakes us, though for a time, it is an introduction to His utmost judgment. It was time to look for a judgment when God departed: so soon as He is gone from the eyes of Miriam, the leprosy appears in

her face: her foul tongue is punished with a foul face. Since she would acknowledge no difference betwixt herself and her brother Moses, every Israelite now sees his face glorious, hers leprous. Deformity is a fit cure of pride. Because the venom of her tongue would have eaten into the reputation of her brother, therefore a poisonous infection eats into her flesh. Now both Moses and Miriam need to wear a vail, the one to hide his glory, the other her deformity. That Midianite, Zipporah, whom she scorned, was beautiful in respect of her.

Miriam would have wounded Moses with her tongue, Moses would heal her with his: 'O Lord, heal her now.' The wrong is the greater because his sister did it. He doth not say, I sought not her shame, she sought mine; if God have revenged it, I have no reason to look on her as a sister, who looked at me as an adversary: but, as if her leprosy were his, he cries out for her cure. O admirable meekness of Moses! His people the Jews rebelled against him; God proffers revenge: he would rather die than they should perish. His sister rebelled against him; God works His revenge: he will not give God peace till she be recured. Behold a worthy and noble pattern for us to follow. How far are they from this disposition, who are not only content God should revenge, but are ready to prevent God's revenge with their own!

God's love to Moses suffers him not to obtain presently his suit for Miriam; his good nature to his sister made him pray against himself. If the judgment had been at once inflicted and removed, there had been no example of terror for others: God either denies or defers the grant of our requests for our good: it were wide for us if our suits should be ever heard. It was fit for all parts, Miriam should continue somewhile leprous. There is no policy in a sudden removal of just punishment; unless the rain so fall that it lie and soak into the earth, it profits nothing. If the judgments of God should be only as passengers, and not sojourners at least, they would be no whit regarded.

Bishop Hall.

RAHAB.

WAS Rahab's treachery to her country excusable? Could her lie be free from fault?

We know that the love of our country, which is, as it were, our common mother, has been implanted in us by nature. When, therefore, Rahab knew that the object intended was the overthrow of the city in which she had been born and brought up, it seems a detestable act of inhumanity to give her aid and counsel to the spies. It is a puerile evasion to say that they were not yet avowed enemies, inasmuch as war had not been declared; since it is plain enough that they had conspired the destruction of her fellow-citizens. It was, therefore, only the knowledge communicated to her mind by God which exempted her from fault, as having been set free from the common rule. Her faith is commended by two Apostles, who at the same time declare that the service which she rendered to the spies was acceptable to God.

It is not wonderful, then, that when the Lord condescended to transfer a foreign female to His people, and to engraft her into the body of the Church, He separated her from a profane and accursed nation. Therefore, although she had been bound to her countrymen up to that very day, yet when she was adopted into the body of the Church her new condition was a kind of manumission from the common law by which citizens are bound toward each other. In short, in order to pass by faith to a new people, it behoved her to renounce her countrymen. And as in this she only acquiesced in the judgment of God, there was no criminality in abandoning them.

As to the falsehood, we must admit that though it was done for a good purpose, it was not free from fault. For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie to be altogether excusable, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God. Therefore, although our purpose be to assist our brethren, to consult for their safety and relieve them, it never can be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God. And God is truth. And still the act of Rahab is not devoid of the praise of virtue, although it was not spotlessly pure. For it often happens that, while the saints study to hold the right path, they deviate into circuitous courses.

The image of Rahab's faith appears, as if reflected in a mirror, when casting down all idols, she ascribes the government of heaven and earth to the God of Israel alone. It is not without cause that two Apostles have honoured her conduct with the title of *faith*. Still, I deny not that her faith was not fully developed; nay, I readily admit that it was only a germ of piety which, as yet, would have been insufficient for her eternal salvation. We must hold, nevertheless, that however feeble and slender the knowledge of God which the woman possessed may have been, still, in surrendering herself to his power, she gives a proof of her election, and that from that seed a faith was germinating, which afterwards attained its full growth.

In the language of Rahab, we behold that characteristic property of faith described by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, when he calls it a vision, or sight of things not appearing. Rahab is dwelling with her people in a fortified city: and yet she commits her life to her terrified guests, just as if they had already gained possession of the land, and had full power to save or destroy as they pleased.

John Calvin.

THE DEATH OF SISERA.

FORTH looked the mother from her lattice high,
To Judah's valleys turned her proud dark eye;
'Why do his chariot-wheels delay so long?
Why tarries thus the valiant and the strong?

Have they not sped? have they not won the day?
To every man hath been a glorious prey;
The gorgeous work by Syrian maidens planned,
And fair young slaves the brightest in the land;

Sure he will deck his loved ones with the spoil.'
In vain she looketh toward that favoured soil,
With shout and song, in peace returning home,
He cometh not; nor e'er again shall come.

Far, far away, within the Kenite's tent,
His brow is pierced, his stately head is bent;
Where Kishon's ancient waters hurry by,
On Taanach's plains, his trampled warriors lie;

For Israel's God hath led the glorious fight,
Abinoam's son has conquered in His might,
And she, who sat by Bethel's judgment tree,
Has risen to chant the song of victory.

One woman, dwelling in her tent alone,
In the Lord's name has slain the mighty one;
She heard the cry of battle on the blast,
She stayed the flying chieftain as he past.

Then say not, here on earth are feeble things
Too weak and mean to serve the King of kings;
The shallow stream, scarce noticed in its course,
Feeds the broad lake, and swells the torrent's force.

Prayers of the poor and lowly, heard above,
Hang, like a charm, around the Church we love;
And sighs prevail, and simple words have power,
More than we think, when foes like tempests lower.

The lowliest child that holy Church within,
Hath his own work to do, his fight to win,
To watch, to pray, to keep his own young heart;
God giveth strength for each appointed part.

C. F. Alexander.

JAEL.

WHEN we read the words, 'Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent,' we have no need, as far as the satisfaction of our own conscience goes, to make any inquiry whether these words were spoken by inspiration or not; whether Deborah and Barak, in uttering this song, spake as the prophet and prophetess of God, or as the victorious and rejoicing leaders of a people whom they had just rescued from slavery. So far as our conduct is concerned, this inquiry is wholly superfluous. If she whom they blessed was blessed then in truth, yet we know, with perfect assurance, that whosoever of us were now to do likewise would not be blessed but cursed. There is absolutely nothing in the tone and feeling of this song of Deborah and Barak with reference to their triumph over the Canaanites, which we ought, nay, which we might dare to imitate. Thus much is plain, without a moment's hesitation, that the history contains in these points no direct instruction in righteousness.

Yet this blessing pronounced on Jael, when taken in its true spirit, is in perfect accordance with God's universal dealings with mankind. I would not blame those who, as a matter of criticism, were to contend that we have no grounds whatever for supposing the song of Deborah and Barak to be recorded as an inspired hymn; that is a question not to be answered in the foolish and hasty way in which some persons are apt to settle it; but on which this is not the place to enter. But be this as it may, we need not lose the benefit of the words; they may be

true, though not inspired. Their spirit is, that God does allow largely for ignorance where He finds sincerity; that they who serve Him honestly up to the measure of their knowledge, are, according to the general course of His providence, encouraged and blessed; that they whose eyes and hearts are still fixed upwards, on duty not on self, are precisely that smoking flax which He will not quench, but cherish rather till the smoke be blown into a flame.

So it was with Christ's own Apostles. Amidst how much of ignorance, how much, according to His own very words, of incapability to receive His full truth, did He yet receive them into communion with Him, and give them the blessed name of His friends, and pronounce them, with one exception, to be all clean. And turn to a later period, to some of those scenes in the Christian Church which most resemble the case of Jael; to some of those stories of persecution, where good men, alas, the while for human nature! were both the victims and the executioners. When we read some of those sad yet glorious martyrdoms, amidst all our unmixed admiration for the sufferers, may we not, in some instances, hope and believe that the persecutors were moved with a most earnest, though an ignorant zeal, and that, like Jael, they sought really to please God, although, like her, they essayed to do it by means which Christ's spirit condemns?

If this be not so, what shall we say of two of the purest and brightest names of their day, of Calvin and of Cranmer? Can we doubt that it was a sincere, though ignorant zeal for God's glory, which led Cranmer in particular—a man constitutionally the very reverse of hard or cruel—to urge the young King Edward VI., in spite of all his reluctance, to condemn a heretic to the flames? And what if it be said, as is most true, that there is a great deal of ignorance which is not excusable but sinful; that men can and do often deceive themselves and fancy that they are serving God, while they are really serving their own evil passions. All this, indeed, is most important to us in judging of ourselves, in leading us for ever to suspect our own hearts, lest they call that ignorance or honest error, which is in reality false-

hood and sin; but yet it does not interfere with that other truth, which is very useful towards softening our judgments of others, that if there be a sinful ignorance there is an innocent ignorance also; that God the Judge of all will infallibly decide which is the one and which the other; but that if it be innocent ignorance, there the sincere faith and desire to please God shall be blessed, notwithstanding its lack of knowledge.

And for ourselves, how great is the lesson here given us of the necessity of a sincere obedience. For if the single-minded man be accepted, even amid much moral ignorance, what becomes of those who are double-minded amidst abundant knowledge? What will be said of us, if being taught all divine truth, if being able to see, which she could not see, that Jael's act was evil, we have yet nothing of her zeal, which, if joined with our knowledge, would burn indeed with a heavenly flame? What inheritance can we expect in her blessing, who, without any of her excuses for evil, are full of evil; who with far more than her reasons for serving and loving God, will yet neither serve Him nor love Him?

THOMAS ARNOLD.

DEBORAH.

IT is no wonder if they, who, ere fourscore days after the law delivered, fell to idolatry alone, now, after fourscore years since the law restored, fell to idolatry among the Canaanites. Peace could in a shorter time work looseness in any people: and if forty years after Othniel's deliverance, they relapsed, what marvel is it, that, in twice forty after Ehud, they thus miscarried? What are they the better to have killed Eglon, the king of Moab, if the idolatry of Moab have killed them? The sin of Moab shall be found a worse tyrant than their Eglon. Israel is for every market; they sold themselves to idolatry, God sells them to the Canaanites: it is no marvel they are slaves, if they will be idolaters: after their longest intermission, they have now the sorest bondage: none of their tyrants were so potent as Jabin, with his nine hundred chariots of iron: the longer the reckoning is deferred, the greater is the sum. God provides on purpose mighty adversaries for His church, that their humiliation may be the greater in sustaining, and His glory may be greater in deliverance.

I do not find any prophet in Israel during their sin; but so soon as I hear news of their repentance, mention is made of a prophetess and judge of Israel. There is no better sign of God's reconciliation, than the sending of His holy messengers to any people: He is not utterly fallen out with those whom He blesses with prophecy. Whom yet do I see raised to this honour? Not any of the princes of Israel; not Barak the captain; not Lapidoth the husband; but a woman, for the

honour of her sex; a wife for the honour of wedlock; Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth.

He that had choice of all the millions of Israel, calls out two weak women to deliver His people; Deborah shall judge, Jael shall execute: all the palaces of Israel must yield to the palm-tree of Deborah: the weakness of the instrument redounds to the greater honour of the workman. Who shall ask God any reason of His elections, but his own pleasure? Deborah was to sentence, not to strike; to command, not to execute. This act is masculine, fit for some captain of Israel: she was the head of Israel; it was meet some other should be the hand: it is an imperfect and titular government, where there is a commanding power, without correction, without execution. The message of Deborah finds out Barak, the son of Abinoam, in his obscure secresy, and calls him from a corner of Naphtali to the honour of this exploit: he is sent for, not to get the victory, but to take it; not to overcome, but to kill; to pursue, and not to beat Sisera. Who could not have done this work, whereto not much courage, no skill belonged? Yet, even for this, will God have an instrument of His own choice. It is most fit that God should serve Himself where He list, of His own; neither is it to be enquired, whom we think meet for any employment, but whom God hath called.

Deborah had been no prophetess, if she durst have sent in her own name: her message is from Him that sent herself, 'Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?' Barak's answer is faithful, though conditional; and doth not so much intend a refusal to go without her, as a necessary bond of her presence with him. Who can blame him that he would have a prophetess in his company? If the man had not been holy as valiant, he would not have wished such society. How many think it a perpetual bondage to have a prophet of God at their elbow! God had never sent for him so far, if he could have been content to go up without Deborah; he knew that there was both a blessing and encouragement in that presence. It is no putting any trust in the success of those men that neglect the messengers of God.

To prescribe that to others, which we draw back from doing ourselves, is an argument of hollowness and falsity. Barak shall see, that Deborah doth not offer him that cup whereof she dare not begin: without regard of her sex, she marches with him to Mount Tabor, and rejoices to be seen of the ten thousand of Israel. With what scorn did Sisera look at these gleanings of Israel! How unequal did this match seem, of ten thousand Israelites against his three hundred thousand foot, ten thousand horse, nine hundred chariots of iron! And now, in bravery, he calls for his troops, and means to kill this handful of Israel with the very sight of his piked chariots, and only feared it would be no victory to cut the throats of so few. The faith of Deborah and Barak was not appalled with this world of adversaries, which from Mount Tabor they saw hiding all the valley below them: they knew whom they had believed, and how little an arm of flesh could do against the God of Hosts.

Barak went down against Sisera, but it was God that destroyed him. The Israelites did not this day wield their own swords, lest they should arrogate any thing; God told them beforehand it should be His own act. I hear not of one stroke that any Canaanite gave in this fight, as if they were called hither only to suffer. And now proud Sisera, after many curses of the heaviness of that iron carriage, is glad to quit his chariot, and betake himself to his heels. Who ever yet knew any earthly thing trusted in without disappointment? It is wonder, if God make us not at last weary of whatsoever hath stolen our hearts from Him, as ever we were fond.

BISHOP HALL.

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

SINCE our country, our God—oh, my sire!
Demand that thy daughter expire;
Since thy triumph was bought by thy vow—
Strike the bosom that's bared for thee now!

And the voice of my mourning is o'er,
And the mountains behold me no more;
If the hand that I love lay me low,
There cannot be pain in the blow!

And of this, oh, my father, be sure—
That the blood of thy child is as pure
As the blessing I beg ere it flow,
And the last thought that soothes me below.

Though the virgins of Salem lament,
Be the judge and the hero unbent!
I have won the great battle for thee,
And my father and country are free!

When this blood of thy giving hath gushed,
When the voice that thou lovest is hushed,
Let my memory still be thy pride,
And forget not I smiled as I died.

BYRON.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

WHATSOEVER cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I come in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering. A rash vow, as appears by his repenting and rending his garments: a rash vow, that he could not come off with either breaking or performing it, but with sin. If he performed it not, he sinned in making a vow that he might not perform; if he performed it, he sinned in performing a vow that he might not make. He is caught under a rash and sinful vow, as a man that hath a wolf by the ears, that whether he hold him or let him go, he is in danger.

It is past all doubting that when he saith, Whatsoever cometh out to meet me, he meaneth some man, or woman, or child of his family. And child he had none but only this one daughter. And it is very like he little thought of her when he made his vow, but some of his men or maids. And whereas our English hath rendered it favourably, because of the great question that is raised upon his vow, *Whatsoever* cometh out, the Hebrew original will most properly bear it, *He* that cometh forth.

For he was now upon an extraordinary and very great design, namely, to go and fight with the potent army of the Ammonites, his forces not being very great. And therefore it is very likely that he makes an extraordinary vow to his extraordinary design he was upon. Now this had been but an ordinary and common business to vow, If I return from the children of Ammon with victory, I will offer the first lamb, or ram, or bullock, I meet withal at my coming to mine own house. Had this been any great vow for the imploring

his prospering in the great undertaking he went about? But to dedicate a man or a woman to God spoke high, and something like the greatness of the design.

And how he served his daughter, when she came first to meet him, is the great question and dispute. Some, tender of Jephthah's credit, and reckoning it not fit to lay more hard things on him than the story will well bear, therefore to make the best of it hold that he did dedicate to God, not sacrifice his daughter; he devoted her to God in keeping her a recluse and nun, and never to be married; though he had no other child, and so his family was like to fall. But on the contrary,—

First, nunship and vow of virginity by the Papists indeed, is pretended to be a great piece of devoting and consecrating the party to God; but that it is so, never was, nor ever will be proved, but only pretended, and with a loud noise cried up, as they did in the great hubbub at Ephesus, Great is Diana of the Ephesians; when none could understand, or see any reason for such a hubbub and outcry. Certainly among the Jewish nation they were so far from accounting the vow of virginity a piece of devotion and religion, that they accounted it a reproach for a woman to be childless; nay, a reproach for a woman not to be married. And not only a shame, but a sin and a breach of God's command. For those words, Be fruitful and multiply, they account not only a blessing, but a command.

Secondly, persons dedicated to the Lord were not therefore bound to perpetual virginity. For we read of some that were so dedicated, that yet for all that married. As Samson, a dedicate Nazarite, yet took him a wife, and that of the daughters of the Philistines; and Samuel, dedicated by his parents, and yet afterwards married and had children.

But if that were not the intent and action of Jephthah's vow, what did he to his daughter? Did he really sacrifice her, and offer her up for a burnt-offering? That was less religion, and less in custom in the nation, to sacrifice a person. And can it be imagined

that Jephthah, whom the Apostle reckons among the faithful, should do such a thing?

I answer, very true. But may we not think him, though faithful, yet for the present that he might fall under ignorance and a blind zeal? It is indeed something hard and strange to think so uncharitably of such a one as he was; but it was now too common in Israel to worship Molech; so that it was no strange thing with them to offer such barbarous and bloody sacrifices as their own children. You may guess that the corruption of the times might suggest to Jephthah the fancy of offering some such sacrifice of man or woman to God.

It had been the part of the priest, and of the great council of the kingdom, to have prevented such a fact as this. The priest's lips should have preserved knowledge, they should have taught him better; and the great council that should have preserved righteousness and good order, should have taken care against such an action. But the nation, it seems, was so overgrown with ignorance and idolatry, and particularly with the serving of the idol Molech, that such a thing as this proved no regret at all to them.

The poor girl, his daughter, begged two months' respite, that she might go upon the mountains and bewail her virginity. She might have hoped that in all that time some rescue might have come to her; either the council of the priests, or the authority of the state, interposing with her father. But all was so out of tune and overgrown with idolatry that Jephthah, who was too much led away with the evil example of the times, is not at all restrained, but rather encouraged by the negligence of those that should have directed and ordered better.

And to one that doth more narrowly search into the Bible, I may recommend this observation to his examination; that in the time of the Judges, the high-priesthood was lost out of the line of the sons of Eleazar into the line of the sons of Ithamar, from one family of Aaron's to another. And whether it might not be because the then high-priest did not better demean himself about this very matter, let him seriously consider. JOHN LIGHTFOOT.

DELILAH.

SOLOMON seems to refer especially to the story of Samson when he gives this account of the strange woman, that she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her. This ill woman that brought Samson to ruin is named Delilah, an infamous name, and fitly used to express the person or thing that by flattery or falsehood brings mischief and destruction on those to whom kindness is pretended.

See the affection Samson had for Delilah; he loved her. Some think she was his wife, but then he would have had her home to his own house; others, that he courted her to make her his wife; but there is too much reason to suspect that it was a sinful affection that he had for her. Whether she was an Israelite or a Philistine is not certain; if an Israelite, which is not probable, yet she had the heart of a Philistine.

See the interest which the lords of the Philistines made with her to betray Samson. That which they told her they designed was to humble him or afflict him: they would promise not to do him any hurt, only they would disable him to do them any; and so much conscience, it should seem, they made of this promise that even then when he lay never so much at their mercy, they would not kill him; no, not when the razor that cut his hair might sooner and easier have cut his throat. That which they desired in order hereunto was to know where his great strength lay, and by what means he might be bound. Perhaps they imagined he had some spell or charm, which he carried about with him,

by the force of which he did these great things, and doubted not but if they could get that from him he would be manageable; and, therefore, having had reason enough formerly to know which was his blind side, hoped to find out his riddle a second time by ploughing with his heifer: they engaged Delilah to get it out of him, telling her what a kindness it would be to them, and perhaps assuring her it should not be improved to any real mischief, either to him or her.

For this they bid high; promised to give her each of them eleven hundred pieces of silver—fifty-five hundred in all: so many shekels reckoned to above one thousand pounds sterling. With this she was hired to betray one she pretended to love; see what horrid wickedness the love of money is the root of. Our blessed Saviour was thus betrayed by one whom He called friend, and with a kiss too, for filthy lucre.

What care Delilah took to make sure the money for herself. She perceived by the manner of his speaking that he had told her all his heart, and the lords of the Philistines that hired her to do this base thing are sent for; but they must be sure to bring the money in their hands. The wages of unrighteousness are accordingly produced, unknown to Samson; it would grieve one's heart to see one of the bravest men then in the world sold and bought as a sheep for the slaughter. How doth this instance sully all the glory of man, and forbid the strong man ever to boast of his strength?

Many in the world would, for the hundredth part of what was here given to Delilah, sell those they pretend the greatest respect for. Trust not in a friend, then: put not confidence in a guide. See what a treacherous method she took: she made him sleep upon her knees. Satan ruins men by rocking them asleep, flattering them into a good opinion of their own safety, and so bringing them to mind nothing and fear nothing, and then he robs them of their strength and honour, and leads them captive at his will.

MATTHEW HENRY.

RUTH.

THE plume-like swaying of the auburn corn,
By soft winds to a dreamy motion fanned,
Still brings me back thine image—O forlorn,
Yet not forsaken Ruth; I see thee stand
Lone, midst the gladness of the harvest-band—
Lone as a wood-bird on the ocean's foam,
Fall'n in its weariness. Thy fatherland
Smiles far away! yet to the sense of home—
That finest, purest, which can recognise
Home in affection's glance—for ever true
Beats thy calm heart; and if thy gentle eyes
Gleam tremulous through tears, 'tis not to rue
Those words, immortal in their deep love's tone,
'Thy people and thy God shall be mine own.'

MRS. HEMANS.

RUTH AND NAOMI.

THE historical things in the book of Ruth seem to be inserted in the canon of the Scripture, especially on two accounts. First, because Christ was of Ruth's posterity. The Holy Ghost thought fit to take particular notice of that marriage of Boaz with Ruth, whence sprang the Saviour of the world. We may often observe it, that the Holy Spirit who indited the Scriptures often takes notice of little things, or minute occurrences, that do but remotely relate to Jesus Christ.

Secondly, because this history seems to be typical of the calling of the Gentile church, and, indeed, of the conversion of every believer. Ruth was not originally of Israel, but was a Moabitess, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel: but she forsook her own people, and the idols of the Gentiles, to worship the God of Israel, and to join herself to that people. Herein she seems to be a type of the Gentile church, and also of every sincere convert.

Naomi was returning out of the land of Moab into the land of Israel, with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, who will represent to us two sorts of professors of religion: Orpah those who indeed make a fair profession, and seem to set out well, but continue only for a while and then turn back; Ruth, those who are sound and sincere, and therefore are stedfast and persevering in their way.

Naomi represents to her daughters the difficulties of their leaving their own country to go with her; and we observe the remarkable conduct and behaviour of Ruth, with what inflexible resolution she cleaves to Naomi and follows her. I would particularly observe that

wherein the virtuousness of this her resolution consists, namely, that it was for the sake of the God of Israel, and that she might be one of His people, that she was thus resolved to cleave to Naomi: Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. It was for God's sake that she did this, and therefore her so doing is afterwards spoken of as a virtuous behaviour in her. And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father, and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

She left her father and mother and the land of her nativity, to come and trust under the shadow of God's wings, and she had indeed a full reward given her, as Boaz wished; for, besides immediate spiritual blessings to her own soul, and eternal rewards in another world, she was rewarded with plentiful and prosperous outward circumstances in the family of Boaz. And God raised up David and Solomon of her seed, and established the crown of Israel (the people that she chose before her own people) in her posterity; and, which is much more, of her seed He raised up Jesus Christ, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

It sometimes happens that of those who have been conversant one with another—who have dwelt together as neighbours, and have been often together as companions, or united in their relation and have been together in darkness, bondage, and misery in the service of Satan —some are enlightened and have their minds changed, are made to see the great evil of sin, and have their hearts turned to God. They are influenced by the Holy Spirit of God to leave their company that are on Satan's side, and to join themselves with that blessed company that are with Jesus Christ. They are made willing to forsake the tents of wickedness, to dwell in the land of uprightness with the people of God.

And sometimes this proves a final parting or separation between

them and those with whom they have been formerly conversant. Though it may be no parting in outward respects, they may still dwell and converse with one another; yet, in other respects, it sets them at a great distance. One is a child of God, and the other His enemy; one is in a miserable, and the other in a happy condition; one is a citizen of the heavenly Zion, the other is under condemnation. They are no longer together in those respects wherein they used to be together. They used to be of one mind to serve sin, and do Satan's work; now they are of contrary minds. They used to be together in worldliness and sinful vanity; now they are of exceeding different dispositions. They are separated as they are in different kingdoms; the one remains in the kingdom of darkness; the other is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And sometimes they are finally separated in these respects: while one dwells in the land of Israel, and in the house of God, the other, like Orpah, lives and dies in the land of Moab.

Now it is lamentable, it is awful being parted so. It is doleful, when of those who have formerly been together in sin, some turn to God, and join themselves with His people, that it should prove a parting between them and their former companions and acquaintance. It should be our firm and inflexible resolution in such a case, that it shall be no parting, but that we will follow them, that their people shall be our people, and their God our God.

Our cleaving to them, and having their God for our God, and their people for our people, depends on our resolution and choice.

The firmness of resolution in using means in order to it, is the way to have means effectual. There are means appointed in order to our becoming some of the true Israel, and having their God for our God; and the thorough use of these means is the way to have success; but not a slack or slighty use of them. And, that we may be thorough, there is need of strength and resolution, a firm and inflexible disposition and bent of mind to be universal in the use of means, and to do what we do with our might, and to persevere in it. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

A choosing of their God and their people, with a full determination and with the whole soul, is the condition of a union with them. God gives every man his choice in this matter: as Orpah and Ruth had their choice whether they would go with Naomi into the land of Israel, or stay in the land of Moab. A natural man may choose deliverance from hell; but no man doth ever heartily choose God and Christ, and the spiritual benefits that Christ has purchased, and the happiness of God's people, till he is converted. On the contrary, he is averse to them, he has no relish of them, and is wholly ignorant of their inestimable worth and value.

Many carnal men seem to choose these things, but do it not really; as Orpah seemed at first to choose to forsake Moab to go into the land of Israel: but when Naomi came to set before her the difficulty of it, she went back, and thereby showed that she was not fully determined in her choice, and that her whole soul was not in it as Ruth's was.

JONATHAN EDWARDS.

HANNAH.

ELKANAH had fallen into an error too common in those times: he had departed from the divine institution which makes of twain one flesh; and had met the consequences of his sin in a distracted family. Hannah had no children; and was insulted by Peninnah on that account, year by year, as she went up to the House of the Lord. Daily vexed and reproached by her adversary, she wept and did not eat: her husband endeavoured to comfort her; but this was one of those many cases, in which God teaches His children that He is their only portion and refuge.

Hannah had long mourned under a grievance which seems to have been peculiarly felt in those times. The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and we may recollect that some of the sharpest trials we ourselves have endured, could not be fully explained to others.

But how does she act under this? Does she, like many who, if they are crossed, fall into murmurings against Providence, quarrel with the affliction, cast the blame on everybody but themselves, and nurse a peevishness and impatience that God Himself cannot please? These are signs of spiritual death, but she had passed from death unto life: she had the life of FAITH, which seemed to say, Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. She sees the hand of God in her affliction, and she bows before it in the bitterness of her soul: she takes hold of it, yea, she hangs upon it, by the life of HOPE. She is chastened by a father; but the life of LOVE in her flies to Him as a father, and pours her soul into His bosom.

We follow her into the temple, and behold her now falling before Him who dwelt between the Cherubims. The world is shut out; and here, in the solemn, silent, and secret place of the Most High, she talks to Him as one well known; she wrestles with Him like Jacob, she seems to say, I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.

Eli, the priest, sat upon a seat by a post of the Temple of the Lord, and was to be a further trial of the reality of the heavenly life which animated her soul. Heavy, indeed, is the burden of that pilgrim whose guide is himself misled; and who, from negligence or mistake, adds to the weight which he should alleviate. But it is one of the privileges of the divine life, that it is prepared to meet errors by an inward and satisfactory experience of the truth. Hannah's trust was in God, not in Eli: she saw him in an error, but knew her best Friend could not err. Accused, and probably shocked at such a charge as that which Eli brought, she neither forgot God, herself, or her minister; but with deep humility and unfeigned reverence for his office, she puts forth the genuine fruits of that Spirit who had made her alive to God.

Grace so softens and sweetens the heart, that its genuine expressions under provocation often rise to a sublimity and tenderness which make the language of poets and orators seem but vulgar and unmeaning artifice.

Happy, though afflicted woman, who could thus stand as a witness of the life of religion, while the sons of Eli were bringing a scandal upon it by their avarice and debauchery at the very altar; and while their pious father himself was negligent as a judge, and mistaking as a minister. Happy witness! who could turn from professors and profane, from trials in the house and scandals in the church, and commit herself to Him that judgeth righteously. This is, indeed, that life of God in the soul, which He will first prove and then own. He proves its reality by bringing it to the test. He improves its power by exercise, and teaches all His children to prepare for it.

The Lord not only honours the work which He has proved, but He often does so beyond all that we can ask or think. Hannah has asked

for a man-child; but it was not in her contemplation to ask for a Samuel, that light of Israel, that prophet mighty in word and deed before God, that blessing and pattern to the world in every age. She brought the child to Eli, and said, O my Lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here praying. You recollect, as if she had said, a poor, broken-hearted creature, drunk indeed with grief, though not with wine. You saw me here reduced to the one help and hope of the comfortless. I am the woman whom you sent away with a word of encouragement, and here is the answer to my prayer; for this child I prayed: and I am come this day to give him up to that God who is all my salvation and all my desire.

Richard Cecil.

ABIGAIL.

ABIGAIL, which signifies her father's joy, had sorrow enough to be matched with so unworthy a husband. If her father had meant she should have had joy in herself, or in her life, he had not disposed her to a husband, though rich, yet fond and wicked: it is like he married her to the wealth, not to the man. Many a child is cast away on riches. Wealth in our matches, should be as some grains or scruples in the balance, superadded to the gold of virtuous qualities, to weigh down the scales; when it is made the substance of the weight, and good qualities the appendence, there is but one earth poised with another; which, wheresoever it is done, it is a wonder if either the children prove not the parents' sorrow, or the parents theirs.

Nabal's sheep-shearing was famous; three thousand fleeces must needs require many hands; neither is anything more plentiful commonly than a churl's feast. What a world was this, that the noble champion and rescuer of Israel, God's anointed, is driven to send to a base carle for victuals! It is no measuring of men by the depth of the purse, by outward prosperity. Servants are sometimes set on horseback while princes go on foot. Our estimation must be led by their inward worth, which is not alterable by time, nor diminished with external conditions.

One good turn requires another: in some cases not hurting is meritorious. He that should examine the qualities of David's followers must needs grant it worthy of a fee, that Nabal's flocks lay untouched in Carmel; but more, that David's soldiers were Nabal's shepherds,—yea, the keepers of his shepherds,—gave them a just interest in that sheep-shearing feast; justly should they have been set at the upper end of the table. That Nabal's sheep were safe, he might thank

David's soldiers: it is no small benefit that we receive in a safe protection; well may we think our substance due, where we owe ourselves. Yet this churlish Nabal doth not only give nothing to David's messengers, but what is worse than nothing, ill words: 'Who is David, or who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away from their masters.' David asked him bread, he giveth him stones. All Israel knew, and honoured their deliverer; yet this clown, to save his victuals, will needs make him a man of no merits or ill, either an obscure man or a fugitive. Nothing is more cheap than good words; these Nabal might have given, and never been the poorer; if he had been resolved to shut his hands in a fear of Saul's revenge, he might so have tempered his denial that the repulse might have been free from offence, but now his foul mouth doth not only deny but revile.

David, which had all this while been in the school of patience, hath now his lesson to seek; he, who hath happily digested all the railings and persecutions of a wicked master, cannot put up this affront of a Nabal; nothing can assuage his choler but blood. How subject are the best of God's saints to weak passions! and if we have the grace to ward an expected blow of temptation, how easily are we surprised with a sudden foil.

Wherefore serve those recorded weaknesses of holy men, but to strengthen us against the conscience of our infirmities? Not that we should take courage to imitate them in the evil whereunto they have been miscarried; but we should take heart to ourselves against the discouragement of our own evils.

The wisdom of God hath so contrived it, that commonly in societies good is mixed with evil: wicked Nabal hath in his house a wise and good servant, a prudent and worthy wife; that wise servant is careful to advertise his mistress of the danger, his prudent mistress is careful to prevent it.

The lives of all his family were now in hazard: she dares not commit this business to the fidelity of a messenger, but forgetting

her sex, puts herself into the errand; her foot is not slow, her hand is not empty: according to the offence she frames her satisfaction. Her husband refused to give, she brings a bountiful gift; her husband gave ill words, she sweetens them with a meek and humble deprecation; her husband could say, 'Who is David?' she falls at his feet; her husband dismisses David's men empty, she brings her servants laden with provisions, as if it had been only meant to ease the repelled messengers of the carriage, not to scant them of the required benevolence: no wit, no art, could devise a more pithy and powerful oratory. As all satisfaction, so hers begins with a confession, wherein she deeply blameth the folly of her husband. She could not have been a good wife, if she had not honoured her unworthy head: if a stranger should have termed him fool in her hearing, he could not have gone away in peace; now, to save his life, she is bold to acknowledge his folly. It is a good disparagement that preserveth. There is the same way to our peace in heaven: the only mean to escape judgment is to complain of our own vileness. She pleadeth her ignorance of the fact, and therein her freedom from the offence; she humbly craveth acceptation of her presents with pardon of the fault; she professeth David's honourable acts and merits; she foretels his future success and glory; she lays before him the happy peace of his soul, in refraining from innocent blood. David's breast, which could not through the seeds of grace grow to a stubbornness in ill resolutions, cannot but relent with these powerful and seasonable persuasions; and now, instead of revenge, he blesseth God for sending Abigail to meet him, he blesseth Abigail for her counsel, he blesseth the counsel for so wholesome efficacy; and now rejoiceth more in being overcome with a wise and gracious advice, than he would have rejoiced in a revengeful victory.

It was no time to advise Nabal while his reason was drowned in a deluge of wine: a beast or a stone is as capable of good counsel as a drunkard. Oh, that the noblest creature should so far abase himself as for a little liquor, to lose the use of those faculties whereby he

is a man! Those that have to do with drink or frenzy must be glad to watch times; so did Abigail, who the next morning presents to her husband the view of his faults, of his danger; he then sees how near he was to death and felt it not. That worldly mind is so apprehensive of the death that should have been, as that he dies to think that he had like to have died. Who would think a man could be so affected with a danger passed, and yet so senseless of a future, yea, imminent! He that was yesterday as a beast is now as a stone; he was then over-merry, now dead and lumpish. Carnal hearts are ever in extremities: if they be once down, their dejection is desperate, because they have no inward comfort to mitigate their sorrow. What difference there was between the dispositions of David and Nabal! How oft had David been in the valley of the shadow of death, and feared no evil! Nabal is but once put in mind of a death that might have been, and is stricken dead.

How far God looks beyond our purposes! Abigail came only to plead for an ill husband; and now God makes this journey a preparation for a better; so that in one act she preserved an ill husband, and won a good one for the future. David well remembers her comely person, her wise speeches, her graceful carriage; and now, when modesty found it seasonable, he sends to sue her who had been his suppliant. She entreated for her husband; David treats with her for his wife: her request was to escape his sword; he wisheth her to his bed. It was a fair suit to change a David for a Nabal; to become David's queen instead of Nabal's drudge. She that learned humility under so hard a tutor abaseth herself no less when David offers to advance her: 'Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.' None are so fit to be great as those that can stoop lowest. How could David be more happy in a wife? he finds at once piety, wisdom, humility, faithfulness, wealth, beauty. How could Abigail be more happy in a husband, than in the prophet, the champion, the anointed of God? Those marriages are well made wherein virtues are matched, and happiness is mutual.

Bishop Hall.

A MOTHER'S LOVE.

HER, by her smile, how soon the stranger knows;
How soon by his the glad discovery shows,
As to her lips she lifts the lovely boy,
What answering looks of sympathy and joy!
He walks, he speaks. In many a broken word,
His wants, his wishes, and his griefs are heard.
And ever, ever to her lap he flies,
When rosy sleep comes on with sweet surprise.
Locked in her arms, his arms across her flung
(That name most dear for ever on his tongue),
As with soft accents round her neck he clings,
And, cheek to cheek, her lulling song she sings:
How blest to feel the beatings of his heart,
Breathe his sweet breath, and bliss for bliss impart:
Watch o'er his slumbers like the brooding dove,
And, if she can, exhaust a mother's love!

S. Rogers.

THE TWO MOTHERS.

TWO women come before young Solomon with a difficult plea. One son is yet alive; two mothers contend for him. The children were alike for features, for age; the mothers were alike for reputation: here can be no evidence from others eyes, whether's now is the living child, and whether's is the dead. The countenance of either of the mothers bewrayed an equality of passion; sorrow possessed the one for the son she had lost, and the other for the one she was in danger to lose: both were equally peremptory and importunate in their claim. It is in vain to think that the true part can be discerned by the vehemence of their challenge; falsehood is ofttimes more clamorous than truth. No witnesses can be produced; they two dwelt apart under one roof; and if some neighbours have seen the children at their birth and circumcision, yet how little difference, how much change is there in the favour of infants! How doth death alter more confirmed lines!

The impossibility of proof makes the guilty more confident, more impudent. The true mother pleads that her child was taken away at midnight by the other; but in her sleep; she saw it not, she felt it not; and, if all her senses could have witnessed it, yet here was but the affirmation of the one against the denial of the other, which, in persons alike credible, do but counterpoise. What is there now to lead the judge, since there is nothing either in the act, or circumstances, or persons, or plea, or evidence, that might sway the sentence? Solomon well saw that when all outward proofs failed, there was an

inward affection, which, if it could be fetched out, would certainly betray the true mother: he knew sorrow might more easily be dissembled than natural love: both sorrowed for their own; both could not love one as theirs. To draw forth then this true proof of motherhood, Solomon calls for a sword. Doubtless, some of the wiser hearers smiled on each other, and thought in themselves, 'What, will the young king cut these knotty causes in pieces? Will he divide justice with edge tools? Will he smite at hazard before conviction?' The actions of wise princes are riddles to vulgar constructions; neither is it for the shallow capacities of the multitude to fathom the deep projects of sovereign authority. That sword which had served for execution shall now serve for trial; 'Divide ye the living child in twain, and give the one half to the one, and the other half to the other.' O divine oracle of justice, commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that which could not be discovered! Neither God nor his deputies may be so taken at their words, as if they always intended their commands for action, and not sometimes for probation.

This sword hath already pierced the breast of the true mother, and divided her heart with fear and grief, at so killing a sentence. There needs no other rack to discover nature; and now she thinks, 'Woe is me, that came for justice, and am answered with cruelty. Divide ye the living child! Alas, what hath that poor infant offended, that it survives and is sued for? How much less miserable had I been, that my child had been smothered in my sleep, than mangled before mine eyes! If a dead carcass could have satisfied me, I needed not to have complained. What a woful condition am I fallen into, who am accused to have been the death of my supposed child already, and now shall be the death of mine own? If there were no loss of my child, yet how can I endure this torment of mine own bowels? How can I live to see this part of myself sprawling under that bloody sword?' And while she thinks thus, she sues to that suspected mercy of her just judge; 'O my lord, give her the living child, and slay him not!' as thinking, 'If he live he shall but change a mother; if he die his

mother loseth a son: while he lives, it shall be my comfort that I have a son, though I may not call him so; dying, he perisheth to both: it is better he should live to a wrong mother, than to neither.' Contrarily, her envious competitor, as holding herself well satisfied that her neighbour should be as childless as herself, can say, 'Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.'

Well might Solomon and every hearer conclude, that either she was no mother, or a monster, that could be content with the murder of her child; and that if she could have been the true mother, and yet have desired the blood of her infant, she had been as worthy to have been stripped of her child for so foul unnaturalness, as the other had been worthy to enjoy him for her honest compassion. Not more justly than wisely therefore, doth Solomon trace the true mother by the footsteps of love and pity; and adjudgeth the child to those bowels that had yearned at his danger.

Even in morality it is thus also; truth as it is one, so it loves entireness; falsehood, division. Satan that hath no right to the heart, would be content with a piece of it; God, that made it all, will have either the whole or none. The erroneous church strives with the true, for the living child of saving doctrine; each claims it for her own; heresy, conscious of her own injustice, could be content to go away with a leg or an arm of sound principles, as hoping to make up the rest with her own mixtures: truth cannot abide to part with a joint; and will rather endure to lose all by violence, than a piece through a willing connivancy.

BISHOP HALL.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

IT is worthy observation, the splendour with which this queen of Sheba visited the monarch of Israel. It is not impossible but that from the natural affection of her own heart, in that innate and inbred pride, which belongs to our whole nature by the fall, though she had heard of Solomon's fame she might have no small good opinion of herself. For it is said that she came to prove him with hard questions. And certainly, if she thought to put to the test the abilities of Solomon, she must have thought herself competent to do so from her own understanding. One thing, however, is evident from her history. Her visit was not in relation to the general system of monarchs, either to make a treaty for the extension of her own dominions, or for the discovery of his, or to form a mutual guarantee of peace for both. Her single errand, it is said, was to know if the general report of Solomon's wisdom was correct, and principally on that first of all subjects, concerning the name of the Lord. But she came with a very great train, and with all the pageantry of a southern princess.

And thus, for the most part, until better taught, cometh the natural man to the Almighty Solomon, our Lord Jesus Christ, when coming to prove Him with hard questions. Like a stately vessel, laden with good things, he hath put on board all his stock. He hath, in his own view, done much good in life; a cargo of alms-deeds, and charities, for which he promiseth himself a good reception at the heavenly port. What less than the sovereign power of God shall be sufficient to take the film off from the eyes so blinded by nature, both to the knowledge of the original and actual sin of that nature?

It was said by the Son of God Himself, concerning the coming of the Holy Ghost to His church and people, that the first manifestations of His grace should be to convince of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. And that the same Almighty God the Spirit should take of the things of Christ and show unto the people. Hence the first apprehension on the mind, under convictions of sin, gives also a desire of deliverance from it, and prompts an inquiry after the person of Christ. And our knowledge of His grace to us is formed by the manifestation He makes of Himself, when, as in the instance of this woman with Solomon, the Lord answers all our questions, and nothing is hid from Him of which He tells us not.

And there was no more spirit left in her. Might not this fainting of soul arise from the view of the solemn service of the temple, and yet more strikingly from the sacrifices which shadowed forth Christ? Who that beholds the order of the Lord's house, His ordinances and means of grace, the Church which He hath purchased with His most precious blood, the bread of life, and the water of life, which is Himself, and which are received and lived upon by His redeemed ones at His sacramental supper, the apparel of His servants, the order of His ministry, whom He hath made kings and priests unto God and the Father? who that beholds these things, and through sovereign and almighty grace knows himself to be the object and subject of divine favour, and interested personally himself in them, and is in the full assurance of being a partaker of these unspeakable mercies in Christ, but must faint in the contemplation, and find himself overwhelmed, like the Queen of the South, who had no spirit left in her?

Robert Hawker.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

THE widow of Zarephath claims our attention as one selected by our Lord Himself for His especial mention. In the synagogue at Nazareth He pointed out this incident in the Old Testament as a sign that God was about to call the Gentiles, saying that many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, but unto none of them in the time of the famine was Elias sent, but unto this widow of Sarepta. The case of this heathen woman thus visited of God was like that of the Gentile converts afterwards mentioned in the Gospels, which our Lord received with so much welcome; inasmuch as they were marked by Him as tokens of what He was about to do in receiving the heathen for His inheritance.

But those instances which come before us in the Gospels were not merely signs and outward tokens of the Gentiles being received, but they were also in themselves very remarkable examples of faith, such as were not found in Israel. Of these was that of the centurion at Capernaum, at the greatness of whose faith it is said the Lord marvelled; and that Canaanitish woman in these very parts about Tyre and Sidon, who by a sort of holy violence, entered the kingdom, and forced, as it were, from Christ Himself that confession, O woman, great is thy faith! We may conclude, therefore, that in those instances mentioned in the Old Testament as going before, the same was the case; and that, in like manner, this widow of Zarephath, who was thus favoured of God beyond all the widows in Israel, had also beyond them all the faith which is accepted with Him.

The poor famished widow fulfilled, while she knew it not, our Lord's highest precept, and the crown of Christian grace. 'Sell that ye have and give alms; behold the fowls of the air; consider the ravens, they have neither storehouse nor barn; seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.' She fulfilled the command, and in so doing received the promise. When all around were perishing of famine, she was abundantly sustained with the bread that strengthens man's heart, and with the oil that gives the cheerful countenance; her memorial may well be treasured in the Christian Church, as an emblem of those who in faith give unto God, and are sustained in an evil world by that true Bread of which he that eateth shall never die; and in gladness of heart partake of the anointing of the great Comforter.

But a higher lesson and heavier trial awaited her. My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, says the wise man, prepare thy soul for temptation. Those that are found faithful are led on from one trial to another, as was Abraham of old, in order that they may receive that better crown which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

The son of the widow had been preserved from death by famine; but what is it to him or to any of us to be rescued for a time from death, if it is only afterwards to die at last? She has, therefore, like the faithful Abraham, to learn, as it were in a figure, the mystery of the resurrection, otherwise life were no life, unless it be that life which is the especial gift of God, the life which is in His Son.

After these things, it is said, the son of the woman fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him. The prophet Elijah had been now sojourning with her, and no doubt in the holiness of that man of God she had learned a deeper sense of sin; her sins old and new had come forth to her remembrance, and she judged aright that sorrow and death are the wages of sin. And she said unto Elijah, 'What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?' It was the natural expression of her grief and her humility, like that of St. Peter

when, made sensible of the presence of God in Christ by a miracle, he fell at His knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'

And what if it be so, if chastening is the sign of God's love, and if He scourgeth those whom He receives, even the coming of a man of God may bring sorrow. When God drew near to David in His prophet Nathan, with forgiveness and acceptance, did He not bring his sins to remembrance by saying that his child should die? And was not the very pledge of his pardon mixed up with those his after sorrows, when calling his sin to remembrance he repeated that memorable bitter cry, 'My son! My son!' And much had she still need of trial; even the disciples, long after they had given up all for Christ's sake, after they had confessed their full belief in His Godhead, and after He had been so long a time with them, yet even at the last they were still as if they had all to learn. No wonder then if this Zidonian widow needed yet greater trials and a greater faith, and a greater miracle—and that she should then say to Elijah at last, as if not convinced till then, 'Now by this I know that thou art a man of God.'

Like the piece of wool filled with moisture, she had a sign in the dews of God's blessing; she needed yet another sign when the wool should be wrung dry by exceeding sorrow, and burned up by the sun of affliction. And is not this the case with the best among Christians? So infinitely great is the knowledge of God, that His divine light but opens the soul more and more to acknowledge and bewail its ignorances of Him—all that is past seems as nothing, as the soul opens to know God; and the state of the most saintly heart is as if it had not already attained, or were already perfect, but forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto the things that are before, if by any means it may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.

Isaac Williams.

THE SHUNAMITE.

THERE may be some reason to imagine that it was with design to humble those who are in distinguished stations of life, and who have peculiar advantages and obligations to excel in religion, that God has shown us in Scripture, as well as in common life, some bright examples of piety, where they could hardly have been expected in so great a degree; and hath, as it were, perfected praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings. Thus when Zacharias, an aged priest, doubted the veracity of the angel which appeared to assure him of the birth of his child, which was to be produced in an ordinary way; Mary, an obscure young virgin, could believe a far more unexampled event, and said, with humble faith and thankful consent, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.' Jonah, the prophet, though favoured with such immediate revelations, and so lately delivered in a miraculous way from the very belly of hell, was thrown into a most indecent transport of passion on the withering of a gourd; so that he presumed to tell the Almighty to His face that he did well to be angry even unto death; whereas this pious woman preserves the calmness and serenity of her temper when she had lost a child—a son, an only child—who had been given beyond all natural hope, and therefore, to be sure, was so much the dearer, and the expectation from him so much the higher. Yet these expectations were dashed almost in a moment. The child was well in the morning, and dead by noon; a pale corpse in his mother's arms!

He now lay dead in the house; and yet she had the faith and the goodness to say, It is well.

This good woman had found the prophet Elisha grateful for all the favours he had received at her house; where she had from time to time accommodated him in his journeys, and thought it an honour rather than an incumbrance. She had experienced the power of his prayers, in answer to which the child had been given; and it is extremely probable that she also recollected the miracle which Elijah had wrought a few years before, though till that time the like had not been known in Israel, or on earth; I mean, in raising from the dead the child of that widow of Sarepta who had nourished him during the famine. She might therefore think it a possible case that the miracle might be renewed; at least, she knew not how to comfort herself better than by going to so good a friend, and asking his counsels and his prayers, to enable her to bear her affliction; if it must not be removed.

Accordingly she hasted to him; and he, on the other side, discovered the temper of a real friend in the message with which he sent Gehazi, his servant, to meet her, while she was yet afar off. The moment she appeared, the concerns of her whole family seem to have come into his kind heart at once, and he particularly asks, 'Is it well with thee? Is it well with thine husband? Is it well with the child?' A beautiful example of that affectionate care for the persons and families of their friends which Christian ministers who, like the prophets of old, are called Men of God, should habitually bear about in their hearts; which should be awakened by every sight of them, and expressed on every proper occasion.

Her answer was very remarkable: she said, 'It is well.' Perhaps she meant this to divert the more particular enquiry of the servant; as she had before made the same answer to her husband, when he had examined into the reason of her intended journey, as probably not knowing of the sad breach which had been made: she said, 'It is well;' which was a civil way of intimating her desire that he would not

ask any more particular questions. But I cannot see any reason to restrain the words to this meaning alone: we have ground to believe, from the piety she expressed in her first regards to Elisha, and the opportunities which she had of improving in religion by the frequent converse of that holy man, that when she used this language she intended thereby to express her resignation to the Divine will in what had lately passed; and this might be the meaning of her heart, though one ignorant of the particulars of her case might not fully understand it from such ambiguous words. It is well on the whole. Though my family be afflicted, we are afflicted in faithfulness; though my dear babe be dead, yet my heavenly Father is just, and He is good in all. He knows how to bring glory to Himself, and advantage to us, from this stroke. Whether this application do or do not succeed, whether the child be or be not restored, it is still well with him, and well with us; for we are in such wise and gracious hands that I would not allow one murmuring word, or one repining thought.

So that, on the whole, the sentiment of this good Shunamite was much the same with that of Hezekiah, when he answered to that dreadful threatening which imported the destruction of his children, 'Good is the word of the Lord which He hath spoken;' or that of Job, when he heard that all his sons and his daughters were crushed under the ruins of their elder brother's house, and yet said, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

PHILIP DODDRIDGE.

JEZEBEL

WE have here, perhaps, one of the most terrible examples that has ever been seen of the justice of God; but of justice preceded by that patience and long-suffering of which St. Paul speaks. Jezebel was enjoying in peace the miserable fruit of her many crimes and impieties; and insolently abusing the silent toleration of Him whose holiest laws she had trampled under foot. She despised, as the Apostle expresses it, the riches of His goodness, not considering that the goodness of God was leading her to repentance; but after her hardness and impenitent heart, she treasured up for herself wrath against the day of wrath, and perished, when she least expected it, in the just judgment of God.

For this purpose He chose Jehu, one of the generals of the royal army, and commanded Elisha to anoint him king. And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her face and tired her head, and looked out of a window. Some have supposed that what led Jezebel thus to deck herself out when she should rather have covered herself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, was a hope which she dared to entertain, that the murderer of the king would feel for her a certain indulgence and tenderness when he saw her thus arrayed. But her words show clearly that nothing of the kind was in her thoughts. For she only spoke to reproach him with the murder of the king, and calling him by the hateful name of Zimri, gave him to understand that he could look for no better fate, no more worthy reward of his deeds than that regicide of former days, who, seeing himself besieged

and on the point of being taken, chose rather to give himself to the flames with all his house.

It is, therefore, more likely that this insolent princess, knowing well that death was not to be escaped, affected to the last a certain loftiness of soul and vain-glorious courage, and in this temper daubed herself with paint, and decked herself with ornaments, that all might see that not even the sight of her foe nor the imminence of death could move or disturb her. Let us leave philosophers and atheists to admire, if they will, what they may be pleased to call her constancy of mind. What Christian will not be horror-struck at the callousness and insensibility which a long course of impiety had wrought in the soul of this queen, who, knowing that she was about to appear before God with a conscience burdened with all the abominations of Israel and the slaughter of so many prophets, thought only of saving appearances in the eyes of men, and took no thought to appease her judge or implore His mercy?

We cannot think without shuddering, of the fate which befel her at the hands of Jehu, by whose command she was hurled from the window, and trampled under the horses' feet. But the impiety with which she had herself so proudly trampled under foot religion, justice, and innocence, must appear infinitely more horrible to all who judge of things by the light of faith. They know that what seems most full of horror to human sense is but the feeblest image of that which is infinitely more horrible in the eyes of God; and that no indignity that any creature can suffer, however outrageous it may seem, can possibly approach that which this same creature offers when lifting itself up with outrage and insolence against God the Creator.

De Sacy.

ATHALIAH.

THESE were terrible times. While Athaliah, of that bloody race of Ahab, usurped the royal power in Jerusalem, both kings, the kings in Jerusalem and Samaria, had fallen by a violent and untimely death. But, by a strange reverse, the worship of Jehovah attained the ascendancy in Israel (though the symbolic worship of Jeroboam was still tolerated), while idolatry was on the throne, and threatened the Temple in Jerusalem. The revolutions in both cities had been brought about by merciless carnage. The politic and daring Jehu had waded to the throne through the massacre of the whole royal race of Omri; the true religion had been established by the indiscriminate massacre of the priests of Baal. In Jerusalem Athaliah had cut off, save only one child furtively concealed from her murderous hand, the whole royal lineage of David. It was not the mercy of Athaliah, but the strength of the priesthood, which had saved them too from her fears and her hatred.

Israel was finally delivered from the fatal house of Ahab; but Athaliah, the queen-mother of Judah, showed herself a worthy descendant of that wicked stock; and scenes as bloody defiled the royal palace of Jerusalem. She had seized the vacant throne, she had put to death all the seed royal. One child, Joash, had been secreted in the Temple by his father's sister, Jehosheba, the wife of the High Priest. Athaliah maintained her cruel and oppressive government for six years, during which the Temple was plundered, and the worship of Baal, exterminated in Samaria, was established in Jerusalem.

In the seventh a formidable conspiracy broke out, headed by the High Priest. The conspiracy was organized with consummate skill: the Levites from all quarters were brought into Jerusalem, and now for the first time the priesthood, with the High Priest at their head, take the lead as guardians of the monarchy, as well as representatives of the religion—that religion now threatened with absolute extirpation, with a rival high priest of Baal confronting them with equal pomp and power in the holy city itself. The Temple of God had been plundered, its sacred treasures given to the priests of Baalim.

As Athaliah entered the courts of the Temple, she beheld the young and rightful heir of the kingdom, crowned and encircled by a great military force, who, with the assembled priesthood (none but the priesthood were permitted to enter the Temple), and the whole people, joined in the acclamation, God save the King! She shrieked aloud, Treason! treason! but her voice was drowned by the trumpets, and the cries of the multitude. Incapable of resistance, she was seized, dragged beyond the precincts of the Temple, and put to death. Jehoiada, the High Priest, who assumed the control of public affairs, the king being only seven years old, commanded Mattan, the priest of Baal, to be slain in his temple, and totally suppressed the idolatrous religion.

H. H. Milman.

THE DEPOSED QUEEN.

THIS life, which seems so fair,
Is like a bubble blown up in the air,
By sporting children's breath,
Who chase it everywhere,
And strive who can most motion it bequeath.
And though it sometimes seem of its own might
Like to an eye of gold to be fixed there,
And firm to hover in that empty height,
That only is because it is so light.
But in that pomp it doth not long appear;
For when 'tis most admired, in a thought,
Because it erst was nought, it turns to nought.

W. DRUMMOND.

VASHTI.

I CANNOT but envy the modesty of heathen dames. Vashti the queen, and her ladies, with all the several ranks of that sex, feast apart, entertaining each other with a bashful courtesy, without wantonness, without that wild scurrility which useth to haunt promiscuous meetings.

The last day of this pompous feast is now come. King Ahasuerus is so much more cheerful, by how much his guests are nearer to their dismission. Every one is wont to close up his courtesy with so much more passion, as the last acts use to make the deeper impression. And now, that he might at once amaze and endear the beholders, Vashti the queen, in all her royalty, is called for: her sight shall shut up the feast, that the princes and the people may say, 'How happy is King Ahasuerus, not so much in this greatness as in that beauty!'

Seven officers of the chamber are sent to carry the message, to attend her entrance, and are returned with a denial. Perhaps Vashti thought, 'What means this uncouth motion? More than six months hath this feast continued, and all this while we have enjoyed the wonted liberty of our sex. Were the king still himself, this command could not be sent. It is the wine, and not he, that is guilty of this errand. Is it for me to humour him in so vain a desire? Will it agree with our modest reservedness to offer ourselves to be gazed at by millions of eyes? Who knows what wanton attempts may follow on this ungoverned excess? This very message argues that wit and reason have yielded their places to that besotting liquor. Nothing but absence

can secure us from some unbeseeming proffer; neither doubt I but the king, when he returns to himself, will give me thanks for so wise a forbearance.'

Thus on the conceit, as is likely, that her presence would be either needless or unsafe, Vashti refuseth to come; although, perhaps, her great spirit thought much to receive a command from the hand of officers. The blood that is once inflamed with wine is apt to boil with rage. Ahasuerus is very wroth with this indign repulse. It was the ostentation of his glory and might that he affected, before these princes, peers, and people, and now that seems eclipsed, in the shutting up of all his magnificence, with the disgraceful affront of a woman. It vexes him to think that those nobles, whom he meant to send away astonished with the admiration of his power and majesty, should now say, 'What boots it Ahasuerus to rule afar off, when he cannot command at home? In vain doth he boast to govern kings while he is checked by a woman.'

Whatever were the intentions of Vashti, surely her disobedience was inexcusable. It is not for a good wife to judge of her husband's will, but to execute it. Neither wit nor stomach may carry her into a curious inquisition into the reasons of an enjoined charge, much less to a resistance; but in a hoodwinked simplicity she must follow whither she is led, as one that holds her chief praise to consist in subjection.

I doubt how Ahasuerus could have been so great if his throne had not been still compassed with them that knew the times, and understood the law and judgment. These were his oracles in all his doubts. These are now consulted in this difficulty. Neither must their advice be secretly whispered in the king's ear, but publicly delivered in the audience of all the princes. It is a perilous way that these sages are called to go, between a husband and wife, especially of such power and eminency; yet Memucan fears not to pass a heavy sentence against Queen Vashti: 'Vashti, the queen, hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and all the people that are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus;' a deep and sore crimination.

I cannot say but Vashti was worthy of a sharp censure; I cannot say she was worthy a repudiation. This plaster drew too hard. It was but heathen justice to punish the wife's disobedience in one indifferent act with a divorce. Nothing but unfaithfulness can either break or untie the knot of marriage. Had she not been a queen, had not that contemptuous act been public, the sentence had not been so hard; now the punishment must be exemplary, lest the sin should be so. Many a one had smarted less, if their persons, if their place had been meaner.

The king, the princes, approve this heavy judgment of Memucan. It is not in the power of the fair face of Vashti to warrant her stomach. No doubt many messages passed ere the rigour of this execution. That great heart knows not to relent, but will rather break than yield to an humble deprecation. When the stone and the steel meet fire is stricken: it is a soft answer that appeaseth wrath. Vashti is cast off. Letters are sent from the king into all his provinces to command that every man shall rule at home. The court affords them an awful pattern of authority. Had not Ahasuerus doted much on Vashti's beauty, he had not called her forth at the feast, to be wondered at by his peers and people; yet now he so feels the wound of his reputation, that he forgets he ever felt any wound of his affection. Even the greatest love may be overstrained. It is not safe presuming on the deepest assurances of dearness. There is no heart that may not be estranged.

Bishop Hall.

DELIVERANCE.

FEAR not, O little flock, the foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow,
Dread not his rage and power:
What though your courage sometimes faints,
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour.

Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs,
Leave it to Him our Lord.
Though hidden yet from all our eyes,
He sees the Gideon who shall rise
To save us, and his word.

As true as God's own word is true,
Nor earth nor hell with all their crew
Against us shall prevail.
A jest and by-word are they grown;
God is with us, we are His own,
Our victory cannot fail.

Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer!
Great Captain, now Thine arm make bare;
Fight for us once again!
So shall Thy saints and martyrs raise
A mighty chorus to Thy praise,
World without end. Amen.

ALTENBURG, *translated by* C. WINKWORTH.

ESTHER.

IT was late before the Spirit of God settled and established an unanimous and general consent in His Church, for the accepting of this book of Esther. But a long time there hath been no doubt of it; and it is certainly part of that Scripture which is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, and to instruct in righteousness. To which purpose, we shall see what is afforded us in this history of this heroical woman, Esther; what she did in a perplexed and scrupulous case, when an evident danger appeared, and an evident law was against her action; and from thence consider, what every Christian soul ought to do, when it is surprised and overtaken with any such scruples, or difficulties to the conscience.

She being wife to the king, Haman, who had great power with the king, had got from him an edict for the destruction of all her people, the Jews. When this was intimated to her by Mordecai, who presented to her conscience, not only an irreligious forsaking of God, if she forbore to mediate and use her interest in the king for the saving of hers, and God's people; but an unnatural and improvident forsaking of herself, because her danger was involved in theirs; and that she herself being of that nation, could not be safe in her person, though in the king's house, if that edict were executed, though she had not then so ordinary access to the king as formerly she had had; yea, though there were a law in her way, that she might not come till she was called, yet she takes the resolution to go; she puts off all passion, and all particular respects, she consecrates the whole action to God: and

having in a rectified and well-informed conscience found it acceptable to Him, she neglects both that particular law, That none might have access to the king uncalled, and that general law, That every man is bound to preserve himself; and she exposes herself to an imminent, and (for anything she knew) an unescapable danger of death: If I perish, I perish.

Her preparation is a humiliation; and there, first she prepares that that glory which God should receive by that humiliation should be general; all the people should be taught and provoked to glorify God; go and assemble all. Secondly, the act which they were to do was to fast, and this fast of theirs was with relation and respect to her; Fast ye for me. But yet so as she would not receive an ease by their affliction; put them to do it for her, and she do nothing for herself; I and my maids will fast too.

Her resolution derives itself into two branches: first, that she will break a human and positive law, I will go in, though it be not according to the law; and secondly, she neglects even the law of nature, the law of self-preservation, If I perish, I perish.

Whensoever divers laws concur and meet together, that law which comes from the superior magistrate, and is in the nature of the thing commanded highest too, that law must prevail. If two laws lie upon me, and it be impossible to obey both, I must obey that which comes immediately from the greatest power, and imposes the greatest duty. Here met in her the fixed and permanent law of promoting God's glory, and a new law of the King to augment his greatness and majesty by this retiredness, and denying of ordinary access to his person. But Esther might see that that law admitted some exceptions, and that no exception was likelier than this, that the King for all his majestical reservedness, would be content to receive information of such a dishonour done to his Queen, and to her God; she might justly think that that law, intended only for the King's ease or his state, reached not to her person, who was his wife, nor to her case, which was the destruction of all that professed her religion.

It was then no sin in her to go in to the king, though not according to the law; but she may seem to have sinned in exposing herself to so certain a danger as that law inflicted. How far a man may lawfully, and with a good conscience, forsake himself, and expose himself to danger, is a point of much largeness, and intricacy, and perplexity. But she had hope out of the words of the law, out of the dignity of her place, out of the justice of the king, out of the preparation which she had made by prayer; which prayer Josephus (either out of tradition, or out of conjecture and likelihood) records to have been, that God would make both her language and her beauty acceptable to the king that day: out of all these she had hope of good success; and howsoever, if she failed of her purpose, she was under two laws, of which it was necessary to obey that which concerned the glory of God. And therefore Daniel's confidence and Daniel's words became her well, Behold, our God is able to deliver me, and He will deliver me; but if He will not, I must not forsake His honour, nor abandon His service: and therefore, if I perish, I perish.

It is not always a Christian resolution to say, If I perish, I perish: I care not whether I perish, or no: to admit, to invite, to tempt temptations, and occasions of sin, and so to put ourselves to the hazard of a spiritual perishing. Or if a man have nothing in his contemplation but dignity and high place; if he have not virtue and religion, and a conscience of having deserved well of his country, and the love of God and godly men, for his sustentation and assurance, but only to tower up after dignity, as a hawk after a prey, and think that he may boldly say, as an impossible supposition, If I perish, I perish; as though it were impossible he should perish; he shall be subject to that derision of the King of Babylon, How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, thou son of the morning! how art thou cast down to the ground, that didst cast lots upon the nations!

But that provident and religious soul, which proceeds in all her enterprises as Esther did in her preparations, which first calls an assembly of all her countrymen, that is, them of the household of the

faithful, the congregation of Christ's Church, and the communion of saints, and comes to participate the benefit of public prayers in His house in convenient times; and then doth the same in her own house, within doors, she and her maids, that is, she and all her senses and faculties; this soul may also come to Esther's resolution, to go in to the King, though it be not according to the law; though that law be, that neither wanton, nor thief, nor drunkard, nor covetous, nor extortioner, nor railer, shall have access into the kingdom of heaven, yet this soul, thus prepared, shall feel a comfortable assurance that this law was made for servants, and not for sons, nor for the spouse of Christ, His Church, and the living members thereof.

JOHN DONNE.

RAFFAELLE.

O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it.

NORTHCOTE.

Then Jael took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand.

GUERCINO.

But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment.

GUERCINO.

Cast out this bondwoman and her son.

SCHRADER

So will I go in unto the king ; and if I perish, I perish.

ARY SCHEFFER.

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee.

ARY SCHEFFER.

And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.

PORTAELS.

Leah was tender-eyed; but Rachel was beautiful.

OESTERLEY.

And she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

HILTON.

The man took a golden ear-ring and two bracelets for her hands.

GUIDO.

And Lot went up out of Zoar, and his two daughters with him.

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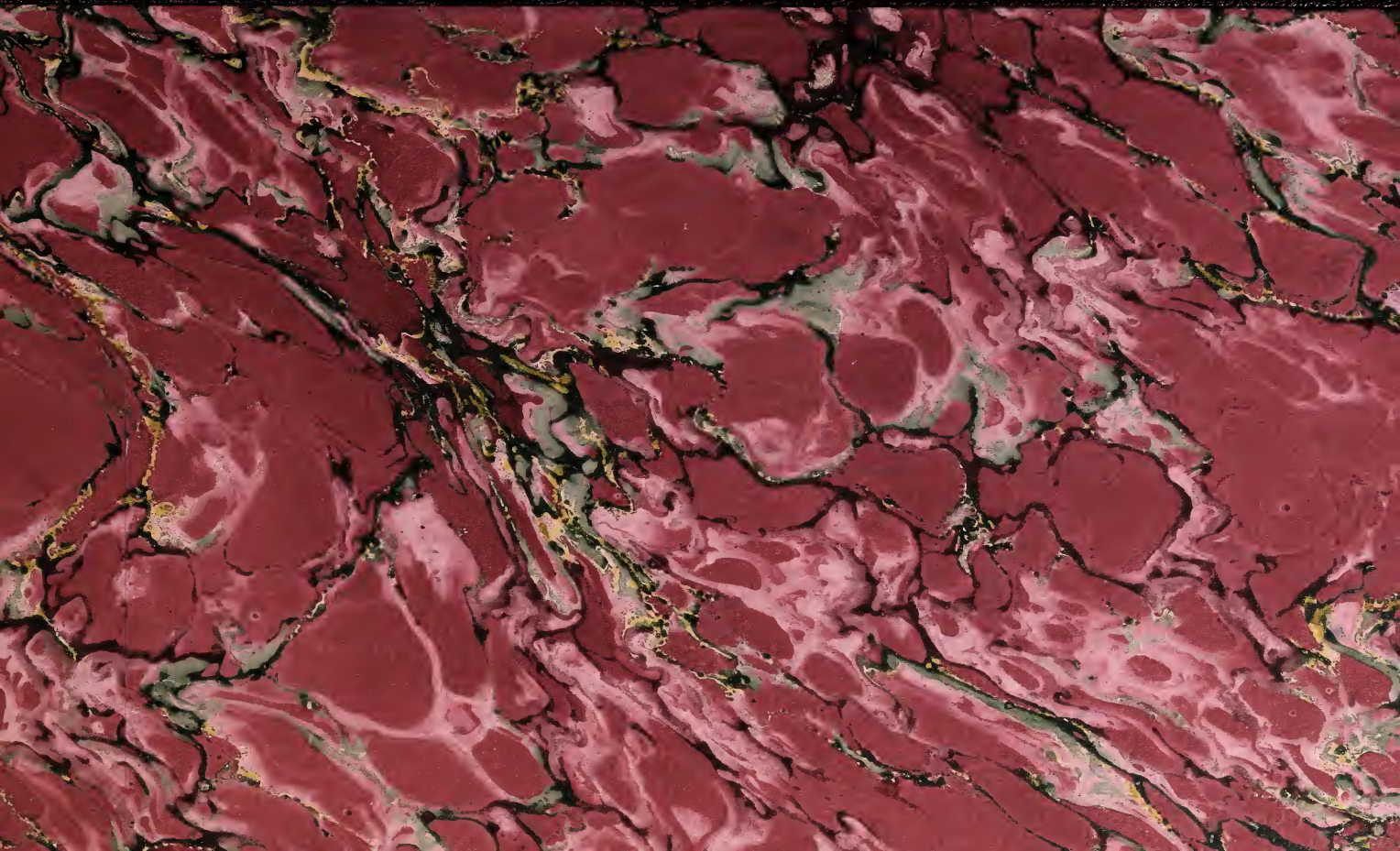
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